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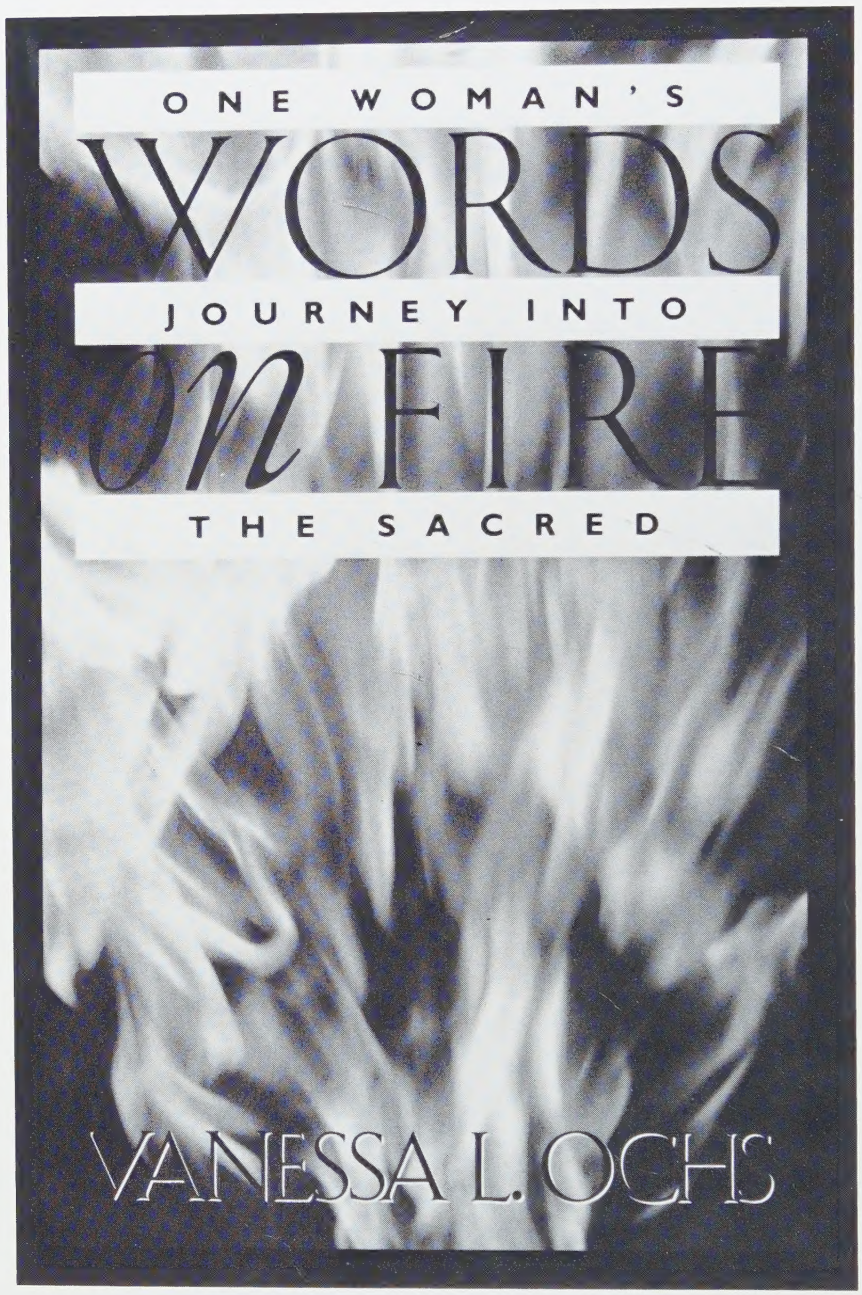

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LILITH

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Cover photo by Ted Polumbaum

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LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: *"After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said, "We are equal because we both come from the earth."* (from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)*

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I'm writing this on a plane en route to Winnipeg to visit my mother, who has Alzheimer's disease.

Each of my many visits 'home' prompts in me a whole range of conflicting feelings: I want to see my mother now, before the disease worsens, and I want to stay away because its ravages are so painful to observe (and must be so much more painful to experience). I want to be with her, to monitor the quality of her treatment in Winnipeg's only Jewish care home, and yet I dread every separation from my own children, especially from Yael, who at seven feels my absence the most.

When my mother's disease was first diagnosed, about 18 months ago, I remembered the words of a friend when I offered condolences after her mother died of Alzheimer's. "I mourned my mother long ago," she told me.

Why do I write about my mother in this column now? In part because of my friend's words and my own "premature" grief at losing my mother – as I'd known her, with all that she'd taught me and with all the complex web of feelings I'd had for her – even while she is still alive. When I first knew that her memory loss and her erratic behavior signaled just the beginnings of deterioration, I yearned for a support group of women, a "premature" mourner's minyan. My husband, our family, my closest friends helped comfort me on an "as needed" basis, and since the structured women's groups I'd been part of in other times weren't with me still, I let the urgent need pass. Still, I felt the ache to be supported in a formal or ritualized way, somehow.

I tell this now by way of introduction to the experiences of two women you'll meet in this issue: Vicki Hollander and Diane Solomon. Both suffered loss, and each found a way to ritualize the pain and its healing, and to route themselves through to the other side via rituals *they* created. I wish I had been able to do the same; I've learned from them, and I suggest that you will, too.

For now, perhaps what I need in the way of ritual is one that acknowledges ambivalence: when I'm preoccupied with my family's gravitational pulls I worry that I'm neglecting LILITH, with it's marvelous progress this year and its increasing need for more financial support. And when I'm spending more and more (unreimbursed) hours in the LILITH office trying to raise the money LILITH needs – from individuals, foundations, corporations, *anybody* – I worry that I'm not giving more attention to the females who are 40 years on each side of me, and who need me too.

Well, I hope you enjoy the contents of this issue, and that the summer's sun warms us all.

Susan

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LILITH thanks the following for their advice and assistance: Barbara Dobkin, Ellen Cannon, Sunny Fischer, Chaim Gerlitz, Pearl Hack, Sophie Danis Oberfield.

LETTERS

DEENA'S 'FEMINIST' RETELLING

I was repelled by Deena Metzger's so-called "feminist" retelling of the biblical story of Dinah, our foremother.

I thought it was sexists who turned rape stories into "love" stories — i.e., she wasn't really raped, she wanted it!

Add to this a comparison of killing the Hivites with the (Christian) massacre at Sabra and Shatila, as well as a description of Dinah [licking] the corpse of Shechem and dancing a striptease in front of her father, and what do you get? A story that makes rabbinic sexism *much* more palatable by comparison, in this feminist's eyes!

Judith Antonelli
Brookline, MA

THANKS TO LILITH

We were so glad to receive your magazine. We are the family of two — me, Pavel Zoslovsky and my daughter Lina, who is thirteen. We are long-term refuseniks, but now there is a hope we could be free very soon. We will be happy to send you my memoir and Lina's verses one day in the future. I hope it could be rather interesting for all the Jews.

Pavel Zoslovsky
Moscow, USSR

HOSPITAL BIRTHS DEGRADING

Sheila Stanger's article "Instructions for the Birthing Team" [Winter 1990] accurately describes the all too familiar rituals of hospital delivery. She misses the mark, however, when she addresses the "special needs" of Hasidic women. She doesn't seem to realize that hospital birth is degrading to all women.

Why should any woman, Hasidic or otherwise, suffer rude remarks, multiple internal exams, skimpy hospital gowns, or the lithotomy position for delivery? These hospital practices are worse than insulting. They are unnecessary, and in some cases dangerous.

I applaud Ms. Stanger's efforts to try to change hospitals. But I would not want to bet on her success.

Sally Mendelsohn
Yonkers, NY

WHY APOLOGIZE FOR COOKING?

I was saddened that you felt it necessary to apologize (in what seemed to be embarrassment) for an article on "cooking " in your Winter 1990 issue, "Food Culture: A Window Onto Women's Lives." No apology is needed for articles on any activity once considered the sole domain of our mothers. What we insist on, must always guard zealously, is our "right to choose."

Penny Abrams
St. Thomas, USVI

PALESTINIAN WOMAN RESPONDS

I came across your magazine while I was in the Jewish Community Center in Houston awaiting the author of *From Beirut to Jerusalem*.

Let me introduce myself. I'm of Palestinian heritage, and my mother still lives in Ramallah. This summer, I spent approximately two months in Ramallah, in the middle of the *intifada*. And despite my American passport, I didn't feel "safe."

I enjoyed reading the article by Reena Bernards "How the *Intifada* Empowers Palestinian Women" [Winter 1989].

May Mansoor Munn
Houston, TX

WOMAN POLITICIAN MISSED

Miriam Arond's article, "At the Center of the Storm: Jewish Women in Politics Talk About the Issues," [Fall 1989] is a thoughtful treatment of Jewish women who in one way or another have informed — and have been informed by — the public political process. The article however, has at least one glaring omission. I did not come across any mention of Ilene Weinreb, the former mayor of Hayward, CA. Weinreb, a committed Jew who served two terms with distinction as a "reformer," was a trail-blazer: in 1976 she was the first Jewish woman ever elected as a mayor in the United States.

On another issue: AIPAC, is the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, and does not stand for American-Israel Political Action Committee.

Jerome A. Chanes
New York, NY

BAT MITZVAH DILEMMA

My middle child is in his bar mitzvah year and receives on a daily basis multiple ornate and ostentatious bar/bat mitzvah invitations. However, the girls seem to be doing "less and less" and there seems to be "less and less" concern about it! Why are we educating these girls in day schools if their synagogues don't allow them to utilize their education and participate in an equal manner?

Phyllis Goldman
Scarsdale, NY

CORRECTIONS

The third stanza, third line of Shirley Kaufman's poem "Milk" [Spring 1990] should have read: "how the rice fields were burning."

The cover photograph of Deena Metzger [Spring 1990] was taken by Bill Aron.

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"There are voices that, in exile, continue to give testimony and to speak for those who are silenced by imprisonment, torture, and death. Marjorie Agosin's is one of those voices."
-Denise Levertov

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KOL ISHAH

Kol Ishah — "Woman's Voice." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, usually in their own strong voices.

FINDING HOMES FOR JEWISH BABIES

Janet Marchese and Joey

Several years ago, Libby and Albert Zucker of Monsey, New York, adopted a Jewish child with Down Syndrome. The Zuckers already had five children of their own, but took in the baby when no other Jewish family came forward to adopt her.

Unfortunately, in the Jewish community, the Zuckers are almost alone in their desire to adopt or raise a Down Syndrome baby. More than 80 percent of the 100 or so Jewish babies born with Down Syndrome in the U.S. each year are given up for adoption, but there are no Jewish adoptive homes for them. They end up being placed in non-Jewish homes or languishing in foster care for many years, according to Janet Marchese, president of the Down Syndrome Adoption Exchange in White Plains, New York.

Jewish families are much more likely than others to surrender their Down Syndrome newborns. This is in contrast to the statistics in the general U.S. population, where about five percent of the 5,000 Down Syndrome babies born each year are given up for adoption, says Marchese. There is even a waiting list of non-Jewish families wishing to adopt a Down Syndrome child.

Down Syndrome, which used to be called Mongolism because of certain facial characteristics, causes mild to moderate retardation, as well as certain, often-correctable physical defects. It occurs at the same rate in both Jewish and non-Jewish populations.

Marchese, who is Catholic, has been advising families of Down Syndrome children since she herself adopted a child with Down Syndrome fourteen years ago. During that time, she has placed 1,650 babies who have been surrendered by their birth parents for adoption. Eighty-five percent of them have been Jewish. Only eight of those have been placed in Jewish homes because there were none available, according to Marchese.

"Ninety-nine percent of the Jewish children are going to non-Jewish homes, because we cannot seem to find enough Jewish families," Marchese says.

"We need to take an ad out in *The New York Times* and write in very large print: Jewish children are institutionalized by Jewish people because they are imperfect," urges Libby Zucker. "Then every rabbi in the world would stand up and holler because of *chilul hashem* (embarrassment to God)."

Marchese is not in the business of placing Jewish children; it's just worked out that way because those are the babies being given up for adoption. "The families are middle-to upper-class with goals for their children — monetary gains and educational gains. They have a difficult time accepting anything less than perfect," she claims. Many won't even take their baby home from the hospital. For those same reasons, Jewish families are less likely to adopt a baby with Down Syndrome.

The problem is especially acute in the Orthodox community, where parents surrendering a child might be reluctant to have her placed in a non-Jewish home. "When Orthodox Jews put on the stipulation that their child must go to a Jewish family, that child will wait," Marchese explains. "There are many Jewish children who are stuck for years [in foster care] because of that obligation."

Dr. Joel Rosenstein, director of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services division of developmental disabilities, agrees. "She's correct — there's more of a problem in the Jewish community and even more in the Orthodox Jewish community.

"There are people who are afraid of rejection," said Rosenstein, who also directs Mishkan, a Brooklyn-based intermediate care facility for the developmentally disabled, which serves a large proportion of Orthodox clients. "They are afraid of *shiddach* (matchmaking) rejection" for all of their other children because one sibling has Down Syndrome.

Stereotypes abound, according to Marchese, whose adopted son Todd Jonathan "skis, swims, is on a school diving team and handles a small paper route by himself. He is mainstreamed in a lot of regular classes. His life has become very normal.

"His parents were told that he would never pick his head up or look at them," she adds. Such misinformation discourages parents from keeping their children, and Marchese is trying to counter that nowadays.

To that end, Marchese consults with hundreds of families referred to her by hospitals and genetic counselors. She talks to families who have given birth to Down Syndrome babies, as well as to families who have received a diagnosis of Down Syndrome fol-

JEW-BY-CHOICE?

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lowing amniocentesis.

One such family is the Friedls of Long Beach, NY, who gave birth to their first child, a girl, last winter.

"We didn't even know for a couple of days afterward that anything was wrong," Ellen Friedl recounts. But then doctors told them that their daughter, Katie Brook, was suffering from Down Syndrome. Among the topics discussed was the possibility of giving her up for adoption.

"We wanted to keep her," explains Ellen, "but we also wanted to be convinced."

"Janet told us the pros and cons, and urged us not to put her up for adoption," says Ron Friedl. "She gave us names of other families with Down Syndrome children, and we spoke to them."

"Janet didn't sway it either way, but the things she said helped us more than anything. We told the doctors: 'Wrap her up. We're going home,'" says Ellen. Their daughter now attends a special school for children with Down Syndrome, and is doing "exceptionally well," according to her father.

From time to time Marchese speaks to Jewish groups, at synagogues and conferences. Last year, she spoke at the annual Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education.

"She wowed everybody," says Danny Siegel, chairman of the Ziv Tzedaka Fund, Inc., a Maryland-based, Jewish non-profit philanthropic organization that helped fund Marchese's trip to Seattle, where the conference was held.

Siegel is helping Marchese reach more Jews. So far, Marchese has spoken in several religious schools, as well as at the annual dinner for the Jewish Association for Retarded Citizens.

"If we could change one mind . . .," she implores. Unfortunately, she claims, none of her appearances have resulted in Jewish families coming forward to adopt a Down Syndrome child.

For further information regarding Janet Marchese's organization or to make tax-deductible donations, contact the Down Syndrome Adoption Exchange, 56 Midchester Ave., White Plains, NY 10606, (914)428-1236.

— Toby Axelrod

NEW RABBINICAL COLLEGE EXCLUDES WOMEN

A new rabbinical school founded by a group of rabbis, some of whom were once affiliated with the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), will ordain men only.

A self-termed non-denominational "coalition of traditional rabbis, lay leaders and Jewish scholars from universities in the United States, Canada and Israel" has established the Institute of Traditional Judaism (ITJ) in Mt. Vernon, NY.

For the upcoming academic year, the institute plans to admit a maximum of five male rabbinical students, all of whom will be traditionally observant and will have studied traditional texts. "There are at least one to two women interested in *Torah l'shma* (study for its own sake)," states Rabbi Ronald Price, dean of ITJ. They will be permitted to study as non-matriculated students in the same classes as the men preparing for ordination.

There are currently no academic programs at ITJ other than the rabbinical track, although the board of directors is reportedly interested in pursuing this option.

Price denies that the institute was created "in order *not* to ordain women. [Opposition to the] ordination of women is not a test that someone has to pass in order to be on the board." Yet, he adds, "all of the board members are comfortable with the fact that we will not ordain women."

Despite these claims, the women's issue appears to have been a key motivator in the establishment of the new institution. As Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, puts it: "Their position on women is clear. They are not prepared to ordain women for the rabbinate. This makes them indistinguishable from Yeshiva University."

Anne Lapidus Lerner, dean of JTS's List College, adds, "To the extent to which the exclusion of women is the basis for founding an institution, then it seems to me that this is a weak foundation. Other than women's ordination, they don't differ with the Seminary."

The new institute appears to be closely linked with the Union of Traditional Conservative Judaism(UOTCJ), which was formed in 1983, in response to the JTS decision to ordain women. Price says that the nucleus of backing for ITJ is based in this Union. But Rabbi David Weiss Halivni, rector of ITJ, denies it is an outgrowth of UOTCJ. He claims that the establishment of the new institute is due to differences in "religious outlook and practice," and he refuses to speak about the ordination of women.

Yet Price terms women's ordination "the final stroke that made traditionalists in the Conservative movement feel that there was no longer hope for *halachic* (Jewish legal) process in the Conservative movement.

— Lisa Klug

Continued on page 26

THE WORLD OF OUR MOTHERS
The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women
by Sydney Stahl Weinberg

"Should become an instant classic in the fields of women's history, immigration history, and ethnic history."—Leonard Dinnerstein

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Remember Who You Are: Stories About Being Jewish
by Esther Hautzig
New York: Crown Publishers, 1990
220 pp., $16.95

"When I was very young, I was told by my grandmother that people who are remembered, and recalled by name, do not really die. It is then that their souls and names become eternal. That is what keeps some survivors of the war sane," Esther Hautzig writes in her Holocaust memoir.

Vilna ghetto, 1940s: this family member, that one, the other one, dead before 25. Still more, shot out in the fields digging their own graves, or starved, or gassed. Hautzig wonders what to make of her young, radiant aunt who switches lines at a concentration camp, preferring death to the abandonment of her aged mother. Is that heroism or cowardice? And what of the little girl, crying in the death line, lifted high by a Nazi guard who begs the mother (who is somewhere in the work line) to identify herself. She does not. Is that cowardice? Or an instinct for survival that buries sentiment? As Hautzig's mother used to say, "Pinch your cheeks, my child, and get on with it."

Esther Hautzig was lucky; her immediate family was only deported to Siberia. She was eleven then, remembers Vilna vividly and the Jews who lived in her beloved city. Dead, most of them. The ones who weren't dead then are dying now of old age. Chapter by chapter, relatives and friends are recalled and kept alive, even if she has to travel to Florida or Israel to find them or locate stories about their lives.

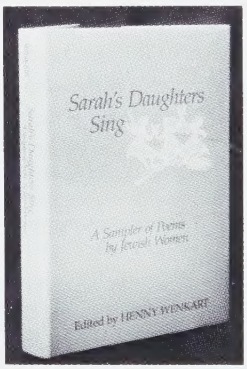
Despite the fact that Hautzig's prose is uneven (and that sometimes she's sentimental), these stories, at their best, are lovely meditations on accident. The first part of the book is stronger than the travelogue or those pieces which feel like out-takes from Hautzig's earlier book about Siberia, *The Endless Steppes*.

Some of the book is predictable, like the descriptions of aging Floridians. But just when you think the story of the sprightly old woman who has been married three times is about to turn mushy, the old lady asks a surprising question: which husband does Esther think she loved the most?

Never mind the answer. It's the question that counts, just as the issue of heroism or folly can be endlessly debated. According to Hautzig, there is no special virtue to surviving, or to being found – only luck. Both the dead and the living must be remembered, no matter whom you love the most.

– Joan Joffe Hall

Sarah's Daughters Sing: A Sampler of Poems by Jewish Women
edited by Henny Wenkart
Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1990
264 pp., cloth $19.95, paper, $14.95



Several communal projects converge in this volume, generated by the New York-based Jewish Women's Poetry Project, a workshop where poets "read to an audience that never asked us why our poems were female or what made them Jewish," and inspired by a sister workshop founded on the West Coast by Marcia Cohn Spiegel. The poems in the opening section reach back to the mothers Eve and Lilith, Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah. The book's final section, oriented toward the future, involves what Marcia Falk calls the "exiled desire" of women for a fuller covenant.

The sections in between sing about and to ancestors, neighbors, parents and children, sex and marriage. The 88 women contributors include well-known and new poets; there are some translations from Hebrew and Yiddish, and even a few 19th century poems. There are poems of joy in the Sabbath and grief in the house of mourning; of aging; of contemporary politics and the yearning for social justice. Faith and doubt mingle – sometimes angrily, as when Helen Papell's Sarah says "not my son" to the command that Isaac be sacrificed, and sometimes humorously, as when Merle Feld at her son's *bris* (circumsion) thinks, "You're a little weird, you male Jewish God/ What do you want with all those foreskins anyway?"

Bitterness and satire inevitably form part of this book. But the dominant tone is tenderness – compassion for the dead and the living, and for the body and spirit of the female self.

Sarah's Daughters Sing becomes a book of longing for the Shekhinah who, Shulamith Surnamer tells us, "feels renewed" as women find their own voices within Jewish culture.

– Alicia Ostriker

Friends: Who We Like, Why We Like Them and What We Do With Them
by Letty Cottin Pogrebin
New York: McGraw Hill, 1988
416 pp., $7.95

Although cross-gender, cross-race, cross-class and cross-sexual-preference friendships are far from rare, they are also far from common. We tend to choose friends who are like us, people who share our interests, live similar lifestyles and do similar things. Part of this is cultural, writer Letty Cottin Pogrebin explains, as we expect our friends to act as we act, do as we do. What then of the liaison between an American and an Arab?

"Arabs refuse food three times before accepting it, but Americans would consider it overbearing to pressure someone who had twice refused to eat . . . .When Americans want to be alone, they go into a room and shut the door. When Arabs or British want solitude, they don't seek closed space, they just stop talking."

Add to these differences variables like race and class, and the complexities of human interaction take on new meaning. "Black children form friendships more rapidly, have more stable friendships, and make twice as many best friend choices as do white children," writes Pogrebin. As Black children mature, they tend to con-

tinue this pattern, but unlike whites, they often veer into cross-class alliances.

For their part, working class people are often intimidated at the table of a boss or middle-class co-worker. On the flip side, those in the middle-class are often shocked that no one in a working-class or poor household asks them about their work or what they "do."

But what of women's friendships with one another? What of the impact of feminism in breaking down race and class barriers? While the past two decades have made tremendous headway in identifying rape, battering, incest and other forms of sexual violence as cross-class, cross-race phenomena, women have still not been able to create inclusive friendships. The task? "Be color blind and color conscious. Remember we are both human beings. The same. But also remember that I am different and special in my way. The same and different. That double consciousness is the hallmark of crossing friendships."

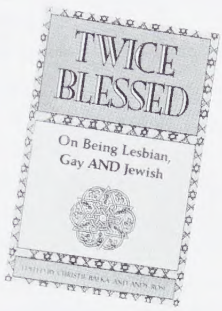
While women relate to women differently than men relate to each other, Pogrebin concludes that both have a great deal to learn from one another." Most women communicate with their best friends on three levels: topical (politics, work, events), relational (the friendship itself), and personal (one's thoughts and feelings). Most men, however, generally restrict their exchanges to the topical.... Women talk about themselves, their feelings, doubts, fears, loves, relationships, families, homes and problems; men talk about competition and aggression and things they have seen or heard." And while men equate friendship with fun, for women friendship revolves around shared angst, trauma or difficulty.

But cultural training notwithstanding, friendships are an essential safety valve and source of pleasure in coping with the caldron of daily existence. Pogrebin has written a wonderful book, a veritable celebration of friends old and new. Although little of her material is earth-shakingly fresh, she has done us a great service by categorizing the obvious. *Among Friends* prompts us to look at our lives and our friendship patterns in a different way. It is exciting, empowering stuff.

— Eleanor Bader

Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish

edited by Christie Balka and Andy Rose
Boston: Beacon Press, 1989
305 pp., $24.95



In Spain during the Inquisition, many Jews who did not flee the country "outwardly converted to Christianity while privately observing Jewish practices." These Jews, called Marranos (a term related to "pig") kindled Sabbath candles in the cellar. They were closet Jews.

Christie Balka and Andy Rose, editors of *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish*, point out another sort of closeted existence. In many of the two dozen-plus essays in this anthology, lesbians and gay men speak their desire to participate in Jewish community and religious life and to be accepted in the synagogue with full identities.

"It feels scary to break the silence," Felice Yiskel writes. She and others tell convincing stories of hiding, exclusion, and joyous return and acceptance. Whatever silence these Jews observe in their workaday lives, passing as straight (and also sometimes as gentile), they long for wholeness. When they can be open, they feel, as Eric E. Rofes, says, "as if all of who I am has a place in the world."

Hiding is "unhealthy for the soul," asserts an Arab Jew who grew up in Asia and now lives in the U.S. Another writer literally trips as he enters the shul, "stumbling" into the heart of a new community. Some speak about the tyranny of a heterosexual inquisition. "So when are you getting married?" families ask. Except in a few synagogues, there is no

Continued on page 24

Prophet *by Shulamith Hareven*
AUTHOR OF THE MIRACLE HATER

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"A *rich slice of Judean life. . . . Written in the sparse elegance of a Chinese proverb, this reworking of biblical themes . . . deftly gives poetic voice to the ineffable in humankind's ceaseless search for religious meaning.*"
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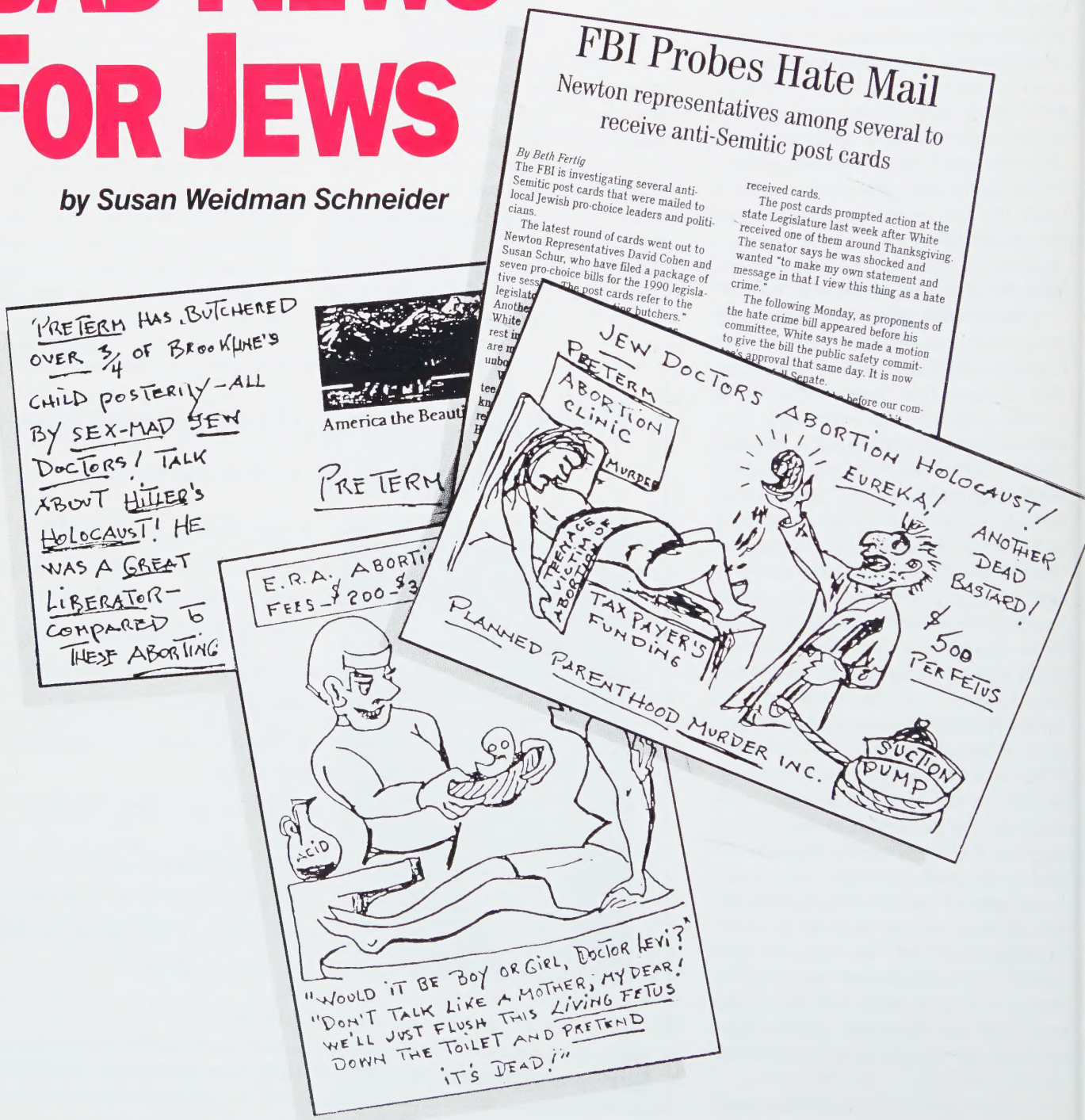
The Anti-Choice Movement: Bad News For Jews

by Susan Weidman Schneider


FBI Probes Hate Mail
Newton representatives among several to receive anti-Semitic post cards
By Beth Fertig
The FBI is investigating several anti-Semitic post cards that were mailed to local Jewish pro-choice leaders and politicians.
The latest round of cards went out to Newton Representatives David Cohen and Susan Schur, who have filed a package of seven pro-choice bills for the 1990 legislative sess
The post cards refer to the
received cards.
The post cards prompted action at the state Legislature last week after White received one of them around Thanksgiving. The senator says he was shocked and wanted "to make my own statement and message in that I view this thing as a hate crime."
The following Monday, as proponents of the hate crime bill appeared before his committee, White says he made a motion to give the bill the public safety commit-
's approval that same day. It is now
Senate.
before our com-
PRETERM HAS BUTCHERED OVER 3/4 OF BROOKLINE'S CHILD POSTERITY - ALL BY SEX-MAD JEW DOCTORS! TALK ABOUT HITLER'S HOLOCAUST! HE WAS A GREAT LIBERATOR - COMPARED TO THESE ABORTING
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"WOULD IT BE BOY OR GIRL, DOCTOR LEVI?"
"DON'T TALK LIKE A MOTHER, MY DEAR! WE'LL JUST FLUSH THIS LIVING FETUS DOWN THE TOILET AND PRETEND IT'S DEAD!"

There are at least three things to fear if Right-wing forces in the United States and Canada have their way in opposing women's rights to – and access to – safe, legal abortion. First is a return to the horrors of "back alley" abortions, with women's lives and health at risk once again. Second is the restriction of our own religious teachings about abortion, affecting Jews and other religious groups as well.

These two factors we've come to understand. The third cause for alarm has been less obvious until now: anti-Semitism.

Opposition to abortion has become the latest conduit for public statements against Jews. Anti-Semitism suffuses the anti-choice movement. Some of its is quite overt (like postcards reading "This country needs another Nazi Holocaust"), some of it is more subtle, but all of it is threatening.

Here are a few recent examples from the proclamations of the anti-abortion movement's rhetoric which should alarm us both as Jews and as women:

• Ray Jeske, an anti-choice activist in Ohio who was videotaped recently by Planned Parenthood, calls opposition to abortion a "watershed issue. It tells us who is Christian and who isn't." On the same tape we see Senator Jesse Helms (D-N.C.) raising his finger and announcing that the anti-abortion movement is "a major cause of Christian reunification."

• In Tampa, Florida, in June 1989, 153 evangelical Christians (including preachers) were convicted of blockading an abortion clinic. Their defense was that they heed the call of an authority higher than U.S. law. "The sovereign of this nation is not the Supreme Court," as one defendant phrased it. "It is Jesus Christ... I'm under God's law....this is a Christian nation." Defendants in a similar case in Texas declared that their attack on an abortion clinic was "a Christmas present for Jesus."

• Robert Cooley, the articulate, conventional-looking leader of the anti-choice group called P.L.A.N. (Pro-Life Action Network), revealed to an interviewer on television (WVIT's "Connecticut Newsmakers" program, July 16, 1989) that, in his opinion, "affluence and comfort lead to abortion" and that "the majority of abortionists are Jewish."

• Randall Terry, the founder of the militant and sometimes violent anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, based in Binghamton, New York, characterizes his work as a "peaceful, Christian movement." He not only wants to ban abortion, but contraceptives, as well. He also believes that religion should be taught in the schools, and he's committed to trying to establish a genuine Christian theocracy in the United States. One of its main tenets would be opposition to abortion.

It's not very far from these sentiments to the quantities of hate mail (some of which even includes return post office box numbers) arriving in mailboxes across the continent. For example, abortion clinics and Planned Parenthood offices in Massachusetts have received vicious anti-abortion postcards from an organization called Lifesavers Legal Defense in Portland, Oregon.

The cards say, "Rich murdering Jewish doctors are dedicated to baby butchering" and "We need another Jewish Holocaust here in America!" Hate mail bearing postmarks from Cheyenne, Wyoming, talks about "the conspiracy of Jew lawyers" who oppose the "defenders of life." Spurred by the New England office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) and the FBI, a federal grand jury last February indicted a Newton, Massachusetts man for mailing anti-Semitic postcards to a Brookline abortion clinic, a local rabbi and the offices of the ADL. Sally Greenberg, civil rights counsel for the ADL in Boston, says that the man indicted, Francis C. Ober, "is using the movement to vent anti-Semitism," but that the actions of one individual should not reflect on the entire anti-abortion movement.

While the organized anti-choice movement does not appear to be directly responsible for some of the most vicious slurs against Jews, it has certainly set the stage for this bigotry with its frequent reference to the United States as a "Christian nation" and its cries from abortion clinic picket lines for "more Christians out here defending the rights of the unborn." The movement appears willing to tolerate anti-Semitism in order to add numbers to its ranks. As a result, anti-choice factions have become a magnet not only for seemingly moderate types like Robert Cooley,

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"It's perfectly acceptable to state smears against Jews for the 'greater good' — that is, 'saving' the unborn"

but also for bigots and the unstable who often rally to extremist causes.

The anti-choice position is the keystone of Right-wing movements in America today, from conservative Republicans to irresponsible fringe groups. The issue of abortion rights gets directly to the heart of important questions about American pluralism. The interests of Jews are threatened now because abortion rights has become the bellwether for this country's tolerance for diversity. Jews in particular have a great deal to lose if the wall separating church and state develops any fractures.

Jewish law on abortion posits that the life of the mother takes precedence over that of the unborn child. According to *halacha* (Jewish law), the fetus is *potential* life only, and its claims are secondary to those of the woman. *Halacha* regards a fetus as having no independent life of its own; life does not begin until birth, and aborting a pregnancy, while a serious matter, is not considered murder. [For a detailed exploration of Jewish law, see LILITH's 1981 cover story by the late Annette Daum on "The Jewish Stake in Abortion Rights."]

Clearly, though, adherence to Jewish law is not the only reason that Jews have been overwhelmingly in favor of a woman's right to choose. Jews favor retaining the right to abortion as set out in *Roe v. Wade* because we have an investment in protecting religious freedoms and in promulgating social justice. We have a very clear understanding that when these freedoms are abridged in one area — in this case, reproductive rights — they may soon be restricted in other areas, too.

Organizations that monitor Right-wing activity, like Political Research Associates in Cambridge, Massachusetts, note that anti-Semitism is permeating the anti-abortion movement. "The background noise in the anti-abortion movement is anti-Semitism. It's perfectly acceptable to state smears against Jews for the 'greater good' — that is, 'saving' the unborn," says Chip Berlet of PRA.

Why has anti-Semitism surfaced in such a potent form in connection with the abortion rights issue? It's no accident. Bigots are always looking for opportunities to express their prejudices. Jews have proudly been associated with the reproductive rights movement since its inception. In addition, the fact that Jewish names appear in the ranks of those doctors willing to perform abortions triggers people's latent anti-Semitism.

Here are some of the forms the anti-Semitism takes: the use of Holocaust imagery, the pitting of Jews against Blacks and other groups, the association of Jews with wealth, and a broader thrust toward Christian hegemony in this country.

Many opponents of reproductive choice equate abortion with Nazi genocide. Here's Robert Cooley again, in a TV interview. "It is interesting to me that many abortionists are Jewish... as an ethnic group something like 81 percent of all Jews want abortion legal under all circumstances. It seems so incongruous, from my point of view, because they suffered at the hands of the Nazis. They know what it's like to be a class of people without rights."

A target for such comments has been Dr. Henry Morgentaler, the Canadian physician and Holocaust survivor who, over a twenty year period, singlehandedly opened abortion clinics across Canada in defiance of a law overturned only last year by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Ironically, Morgentaler has said that it was his very experience of the concentration camps, with forced childbearing *and* forced abortions, that caused him ever afterwards to be an activist for women having control over when and if they will have children. Morgentaler has been greeted at abortion clinics with placards saying, "Jewish abortionist killing our babies" and "Another Hitler."

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, last October, Operation Rescue — Randall Terry's group, which attempts to block access to abortion clinics — picketed a synagogue Yom Kippur eve, apparently because the rabbi, a member of the interdenominational Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, had testified at the trial of people charged with blockading the local abortion clinic. (The director of the clinic is also Jewish, and a member of this congrega-

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tion.) In this case the signs read, "Abortion is the American Holocaust." One of the protesters told a reporter for the *Albuquerque Tribune* that Jews "don't believe that other people killed in the world are as important as their people being killed."

Robert Cooley and others in the anti-abortion movement have cited specious figures about a decline in Black population growth in the United States since *Roe v. Wade* was passed in 1973, with the implication that "Jewish abortionists" are killing Black "babies." (In the 70's, some Black men were visible in anti-abortion camps, arguing for Black population growth — but Black women have overwhelmingly supported pro-choice.)

In an imaginative variation on this theme, a piece of hate mail received at the LILITH office describes abortions as "a kike and nigger conspiracy." Postcards addressed to an abortion clinic in Brookline, Massachusetts, claim that "so far the Jewish doctors have murdered eight million defenseless babies — mostly Christians. This calls for war — eliminate the American Jew!"

Jews are being accused not only of "murder" but also of getting rich from their "crimes." Once again, the convenient old cabal — the blood libel that has surfaced since medieval times — rears its head. Jews "take the lives of innocent Christian babies," this time not for arcane religious rites, but for profit. This is a powerful theme in the anti-choice chorus. The Jew as money-lender is now the Jew as profiteer.

Dr. Morgentaler in Canada is accused of profiting from abortions. Postcards sent anonymously proclaim "Jew Doctors Abortion Holocaust! $500 per fetus." Similarly vulgar literature suggests that money, leisure and/or selfishness are the motives for abortions.

There are those who say that the "correct" Christian view is that life begins at conception. Based on this premise, they want to pass a Constitutional amendment outlawing abortion. Since Jewish law takes a different view, and since Jews adamantly defend separation of church and state, this argument is disturbing to us.

"Jews don't believe that other people killed in the world are as important as their people being killed."

This same attempt to limit all people's choices to those acceptable to only a few is behind the successful drive to ban fetal tissue research and to boycott U.S. pharmaceutical firms which might market the new abortion pill now widely available in France. This view argues for a fetus being delivered even if it endangers the mother's life.

Misogyny is clearly a strong force behind the anti-choice movement. Women are being blamed for getting pregnant; childbirth is viewed as appropriate punishment for their sins. Children's birth defects are the fault only of their mothers. And some judges have jailed women for drug use during pregnancy. The president of the American Life League is quoted as saying: "We must return to a respect for chastity." There is a continuum from "pro-life" to the proposal that all contraception be banned and to the belief that family planning clinics be shut down.

The abortion issue has become — as, in another way the "JAP" issue was — a pernicious amalgam of anti-Semitism and misogyny. Interfering with reproductive freedoms is a way of keeping all women down and, now, a way of expressing anti-Jewish feelings at the same time. Thus it's a very appealing and a very useful issue for the political Right. As Jewish women we must be alert to this and make every effort to speak out for abortion rights, while at the same time recognizing and naming this new wave of anti-Semitic expression in the anti-choice movement. L

Thanks to Sally J. Greenberg and Jill Kahn of the Anti-Defamation League for providing some of the documentation for this material.

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MARJORIE AGOSIN: A WOMAN, A JEW AND A CHILEAN

Ted Polumbaum

"Political torture — when we are speaking of imprisoned women — implies a sexual relationship," says Marjorie Agosin, the author of *Zones of Pain* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1988), a spare, elegiac, hallucinatory collection of poetry about female torture victims in Chile, Treblinka, Argentina and elsewhere. "It's an unspeakable evil, a sexuality of evil. I am a woman, a Jew and a Chilean. That is how I come to write about repression and torture, including sexual torture.

"Yes, I've been totally privileged and spared the political violence that I write about," she continues. "But my work is autobiographical in terms of my empathy. I know many female survivors of torture, families of *desaparecidos*, my Jewish family was among the first to come to Chile. Pogroms are in my soul."

In Chile, the dictatorship that seized power after the murder of Salvador Allende in 1973 tortured, mutilated and murdered not only those who opposed their regime overtly, but also artists and other "subversives;" women were particularly victimized. Chile was not alone. In Argentina, during the military junta's reign of terror from 1976 to 1983, activists and non-political people alike were kidnapped, inluding pregnant women. (See "My Children Are Disappeared" by Aviva Cantor, LILITH, Summer 1986.)

Agosin's non-fiction books — *The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: The Story of Renée Epelbaum* (Stratford, Ontario: Williams-Wallace Publishers, 1989) and *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras: Chilean Women and the Pinochet Dictatorship* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1989) — explore similar motifs as her poetry. Proceeds from her non-fiction support the women about whom Agosin writes.

Having left Chile — by choice — in 1972, Agosin now lives with her husband and two-year-old son in Wellesley, Massachusetts. A tenured professor in the Spanish department at Wellesley College, Agosin's courses reflect her ideology: "Literature in Human Rights," "Legacy of Hispanic Women" (which Agosin describes as appropriate for "writers, painters and activists"), and "Witnesses for the Persecution: Women Writers in Comparative Literature."

Agosin's message to her students is "to understand that our situation of privilege is a tool for changing the world, but not through paternalism. We must work through 'circular understanding,' that is, we must come to know that the Mapuche Indian woman has much to teach us, that women of the Third World know more than we do about what it means to be human, to be kind."

To Jewish women, Agosin suggests, "become comfortable with your identity. When you are comfortable with that you become universal." With these words as a political backdrop, it becomes easier to understand why, for example, a single Agosin poem invokes, without pause, both Anne Frank and Sonia de las Mercedes.

"It's time for Jewish women to see the Holocaust as a people's issue, not just a Jewish one. Why did I get involved in human rights? Because I have a Jewish vision, everything about being Jewish has made me care about injustice." She adds, "North American Jews should take a closer look at Latin American Jewry as well. Many of us live under repressive dictatorships."

Agosin dedicates her book: *"A mi hijo que nunca pudo ver el cielo"* ("For my child who could never see the sky"), explaining, "There were many, many women who were tortured while they were pregnant, and these mothers aborted . . . .

"If the convictions of a country supports torture," she continues, "it must be denounced. I write about these issues because the violence in Latin America is everywhere. It is impossible not to see it.

"Yet," she says bitterly, "most people don't see it. That is why this world is so rotten." L

—Susan Schnur

EL DIOS DE LOS NIÑOS
—Para Elena Gascón-Vera

Mientras la desnudaban amarrándola
y con precisión de anfitriones y cirujanos
le preguntaron que en
que Dios creía
si en el de los moros o judíos
ella cabizbaja y tan lejana
repetía
yo creo en el Dios de los niños.

THE GOD OF CHILDREN
—For Elena Gascón-Vera

They undressed her and bound her
and speaking precisely as diplomats and surgeons
asked her
which God she believed in
that of the Moors or that of the Jews
head hanging and so far away
she kept saying
I believe in the God of children.

TORTURE
—For Rosa Montero and all those who told her their stories

Slowly and in secret
the roof of my silenced mouth burning
and I already naked and
so far away
conspiring to trap
my nipples, thin wires of terror.
Their small fingers, sloughed off scales of bitter wormwood
venture along that slow agony, through obscured
brightness between my legs
and they, the idle hangmen
pant while
the moon's blood
howls on the sickly metal surface,
they wipe my forehead
so that later they can empty the
scattered leaves of my story
and between gaps of time
seconds of air
electric spears and tears
explode like falling leaves of unhinged warriors
fingernails spread out over the floor in flames and menses,
teeth crushed by shocks and traitorous spittle
let go from the shore of my lips
now shorn of word, truth, light
now turned into something other,
even my hair splits, withers
among the ashes and fans out like doomed petals
naked I am forced to face
each one of them
to confess to them
secrets I never had,
uncertain living places
and before each silence,
black shrouds like those of mordant warlocks
coil round me to
consume the tongue that had nothing to tell,
to strip the tongue
that once knew about birds, light and onions
in a garden
and again the torment of glowing wires weaving me in
threads of ill omen, the soles of my feet, my
breasts shrunken by the terror of the
terrible green talons.
Now I am dead,
my name is Carmen, or Maria,
I am a woman
immersed in silence,
immersed in my nakedness,
an imprisoned
stone,
I am a dead woman who managed to survive
who told nothing
new
who in a matter of moments lost aromas, lilacs, yellow,
while sleeping next to other bodies defecating, dying
from pain and not from fear,
I am the woman who was blindfolded for a second, for a month
and forever
impaled by the
eternal ceremony of
torture.

NAKED GIRLS IN THE FORESTS OF BARBED WIRE

I. At times I dressed up as a priestess, and went leaping through the air.
At times we visited houses of prostitution and washed the walls with coppery leaves.
At times we played games of staring at one another, of seeing waves in the breezes.
Truth was uncertain. The sirens of the alarms stable, secure. Then you and I loved each other with a kind of perverse and censorious madness. I loved to take off your clothes, wrap you in a prickly woolen shawl, nibble your tiny and sincere nails, spread honey over your shoulders and let the seasons, the bears clean the unthinking wounds of love.
— You waited for the precise moment to shear my hair of a Russian princess; to stain it with the venomous seaweed you always kept at the shore of your feet. At times you would slap my hands ceremoniously like a courtly old gentleman. I trancelike would pretend to sleep in your hair, and you would burst wantonly through the lines of my palms.
Like a confident sorcerer, splendid in caresses, you said: You can't escape until we take off our clothes and explore all the dark splotches of the ceiling.

II. We loved each other with signs and gestures, amid grapes at midnight and piled up clothes in that uninhabited house. Not trusting words we called out to each other covertly, in a frenzy of delicate pornography.
Suddenly it all ceased to be. All the promises between the ears and the clear language of the lips when you said to me: Strip naked Jew girl right now, quick, strip naked hurry, you'll be taken care of if anything happens.

III. Streaming into the illusory warmth of the room they come, drift among the sunflowers and the woolen covers, hover over the sheets blest with sea breezes, invade through the walls, besiege the immense space, erupt through the volcano of tree trunks, the naked Jewish girls from the thick forests of Dachau, Treblinka, Baden-Baden, defenseless Jewish girls coming through the smoky fog. Defenseless before a forest of Aryan serpents slithering over breasts, buttocks. The body of one Jewish girl distilled from the forests of barbed wire.

IV. naked Jewish girls.
nameless, silent
Jewish girls contriving to call out words of faith, closing legs and lips
with the ancient dignity of the innocent,
statues of smoke harried into showers of blue gas, black showers with the taste of sickly vineyards.

V. naked Jewish girls
the survivors, the vanished ones sinking down heavily between your knees, come back from the forests of barbed wire. Come back to the place of demented discoveries, machination of rats, crackling bonfire, bathed in death, black, exact. You too seem to crackle in that fire, while the hangmen paste premeditated smiles on their faces the better to see an elemental body; a naked Jewish woman asleep, tattoo between the legs.

VI. Clear that never had we known how to see ourselves.

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Translated by Cola Franzen
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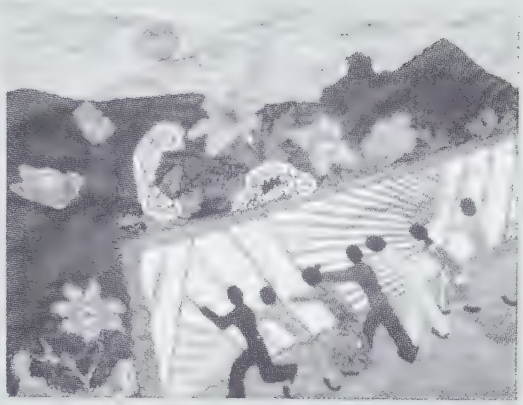
KILLING OUR SORROWS



The wall here symbolizes imprisonment. The figures are trying to escape, to reach the Chile that is beautiful and lush, the Andes that are enduring.

"My *arpilleras* are very disturbing," says a Chilean craftswoman, describing her autobiographical, appliqued and embroidered wall-hangings. "I remember one I made with much pain, with my son as a little boy running across the sand on the beach, and in a little pocket on the back, I put a message that said, 'When I find my son, I will take him to the sea so he can run barefoot across the sand again.'"

Marjorie Agosin's new book, *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras: Chilean Women and the Pinochet Dictatorship*, explores the communal workshops in which poor women who are also members of the Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared gather together to sew, earn money and "kill our sorrows" by stitching *arpilleras*. The colorful, folk-art tapestries depict real scenes from these women's lives — including representations of torture, poverty and kidnappings. "We don't make the *arpilleras* just to show little nothings or a field of flowers," comments one craftswoman. The artform was "born to show our real lives, disappeared children, hunger, unemployment, common soup kitchens, our lack of light and water."

Describing a wall hanging that symbolizes the arrest of her son, an artist explains, "Here a tree crushes my son, a tree full of flowers. I gather one flower and roll it down the road." Another worker points to "a shattered house, a destroyed building, a broken home. [This is what it has been like] since the disappearance of my son and daughter-in-law," she says.

Of the communal workshop experience itself, an *arpillerista* says, "My companions here have helped me .... When have I not wandered, where have I not gone looking, banging on closed doors? I was almost out of my head.... The first *arpillera* I made showed the disappearance of my son; it took me a month because every doll I made had something so despairing about it. I lived alone ... to relieve my anguish I [came here and] made *arpilleras*."

There is "a great anxiety at having to express openly all one's inner feelings, to have to sew and put together every detail," says another *arpillerista*. "But [we are] happy to denounce what is happening."

"In the beginning," continues another woman, "our husbands were against the workshops, they didn't want us to come, but now they take an interest and sometimes help us cut out the pieces for the dolls."

In one *arpillera*, a blue fabric river runs down the middle of the cloth. Still, the children's water pails read: "Give me water," "we need water," "please a little water."

Says Eduardo Galeano (author of *The Open Veins of Latin America*) in Agosin's book, "The *arpilleras* are the only valid indigenous Chilean art, now that the murals have been painted over, the poets and singers murdered and imprisoned."

Marjorie Agosin has a traveling exhibition of 40 political *arpilleras* with accompanying texts. For more information, contact the New England Foundation of the Arts, 678 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02131, 617-492-2914. Rental is $400. A video of Agosin's human rights efforts, including her work with *arpilleristas*, is available as well. Contact La Plaza, WGBH Educational Foundation, 125 Western Avenue, Boston, MA 02134, 617-492-2777, ext. 2291. L

—Susan Schnur

On the Path To Power:

Women Decode the Talmud in Their Own Style

by Vanessa Ochs

A chronicle of one woman's year in Jerusalem and her quest for a female model for learning and teaching.

I had been hearing stories of the Orthodox Talmud teacher Malke Bina. In Hebrew, her name is both funny and fitting for her profession, much as the name I. M. Fine suits a physician. Loosely translated, Malke Bina means "Queen Brain" or "Queen of Understanding."

I had heard one person refer to her as "an apologist who exalts the lower status of women" and "a strong woman among weak men." Another called her "a *weibl*, a Jewish wife who teaches girls to go to the mikvah." And someone else said, "Malke Bina does not see the problems Jewish women have. She should have her glasses fixed." I didn't think Malke Bina would offer me what I was looking for. She sounded like a lightweight who dabbled in Talmud. But then I heard others speak of her in a totally other vein. A male teacher in a women's yeshiva had complained, "What does Malke Bina think she is, a rabbi?" Someone called her a "well-disguised, quiet time bomb who opened up doors for women to study Talmud." And yet another referred to her as "Jerusalem's best-known woman Talmud teacher."

My curiosity was piqued. I would meet Malke Bina for myself and see just how serious an item she was.

photos by Debbi Cooper

It was late in the afternoon when I visited Malke at home. She was with four of her five children in the Old City apartment she shared with her Israeli-born husband, Rabbi Aharon Bina, dean of foreign students at Yeshivat Hakotel. It was an enormous modern apartment, Scandinavian in its brightness and clean lines, yet cozy. There was none of the dreary inattention to aesthetics that I associated with the yeshiva world. I felt elevated to be welcomed into a house that evoked the proverb: "A house is built by wisdom/And is established by understanding;/By knowledge are its rooms filled/ With all precious and beautiful things" (Proverbs 24:3).

The Bina household was always open. Malke's former Bruria students would drop by to consult about their lives as though she were a combination of spiritual adviser, therapist, and big sister. Boys from Rabbi Bina's yeshiva would come in at eleven or twelve at night to help themselves to drinks or fruit. Malke recalled the time she and her husband were strolling in the Jewish Quarter and met one of Rabbi Bina's students with his father, who was visiting. The father asked Malke what she did, and the son proudly answered for her, "Don't you know, Daddy? I always come in late at night and Mrs. Bina is sitting at the dining room table and learning. She teaches Talmud."

We started out in Malke's kitchen, surrounded by a row of cabinets and the good smell of root vegetables in a boiling soup. Malke was telling one son to see if there was something good on TV, advising another son on the phone to buy himself a slice of pizza while he waited for his dental appointment, and fixing bowls of soup for yet another son and his friend. She was going to set aside time to teach Mishnah to her only daughter, Chaya, because it was not taught in her school. "I agreed to teach her Mishnah *Pesahim*, to get ready for Passover. But you know how hard it is to teach your own child."

The predinner chaos was only marginally controlled, as it usually was in my house. Seeing the chaos relieved me. Malke didn't float in a bubble of holy knowledge. She was a working mother of four sons and a daughter whose job was Talmud. She didn't compartmentalize her life. She was whole: always a mother, a wife, a teacher.

Malke fixed us some herb tea and fed me a spoonful of the soup. It was good. "Take down the recipe," she advised.

Malke Bina's Vegetable Soup for Winter

Fry onions in 2 T oil.
Brown 3 T matzo meal for added body.
Dump in any vegetable: stalks of celery, carrots, potatoes, squash, red peppers, kohlrabi.
Cover with water.
Add ½ cup barley.
Simmer 2 hours.

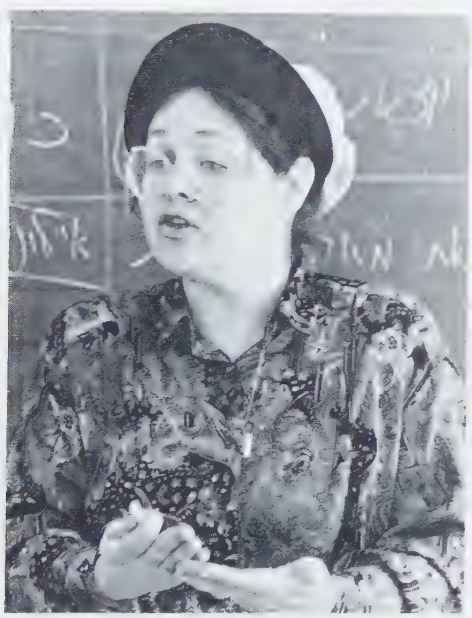
To know Talmud, to know cooking — for Malke, all knowledge was valuable, all could be integrated. Surely, the Vilna Gaon had not whipped up many pots of

soup in his day. It is true that making nourishing and tasty soup took time away from Malke's learning, but it didn't diminish her scholarship. Soup organized experience: soup was a poem of love, of sustenance, of celebrating plenty, of surviving the cold. Torah fed life, so did soup.

Malke was from Baltimore, the daughter of Rabbi Boruch and Leah Milikowsky. At the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore, her father was the *mashgiah*, a rabbinical supervisor whose duty it was to monitor and motivate the intellectual and spiritual growth of the boys in his charge.

"Did your father influence your profession?"

"My father didn't encourage me specifically to go on with my Jewish learning. I think he might have liked for me to be a math professor or a psychologist, but he didn't discourage me either. He's a very practical man and he thought: You're a woman. Something in the secular world might be a better career."



At seventeen, Malke came to Israel to study for three years at the women's seminary, Michlala. She decided to study religious subjects and math and to decide between them later on. The sister of her future husband, Aharon, studied at Michlala. She was nineteen then, twenty when they married.

I asked if she wouldn't mind reviewing a point in the Gemara we'd been doing in class in tractate *Ketubbot*, which concerns wedding contracts.

The cadences of Malke's speech switched to Talmud singsong. "The claim is that the husband has the right in certain situations to come to the court and say 'I found my wife not to be a virgin because it was too easy for me to have relations with her.' *Petah patuah* — the vaginal area was too open."

Malke assumed I recalled the argument better than I did, and so represented it to me in shorthand. I strained to follow.

My head was swimming. This was as hard for me as trigonometry. I was embarrassed to admit that I wasn't following too well. I listened on, hoping I would eventually get it.

"Finally, I blurted out what was on my mind:

> I know Talmud isn't a woman's novel. It's the world perceived by generations of men. The tiny peeps of a woman's voice in Talmud are like squeaks in a roaring engine. I need to know what it's like for you to subsist on a steady diet of the world perceived by a male intelligence and a male concept of law. Doesn't that bother you? Isn't it an enormous problem?

Malke was a good listener. She truly appreciated that the maleness of Talmud could bother me so, given who I was and where I came from. She, who spent her days poring over Talmud, was untroubled.

> Talmud may have been a bit different on certain points if women had been involved. If that would have been the case, I'd enjoy it more and find it more fulfilling. *But it didn't happen*. There's a popular expression in Hebrew that translates as "If grandma had skates." It means you can't ask What if? It would have been nice if women had also contributed to the Talmud. But it didn't happen. I hate to make an issue of sex. Men were the people who were studying then and for whatever reasons women didn't study then. We're dealing with people who had the Jewish nation so much on their minds that they wouldn't go down to sexist issues. If I were making a law, I wouldn't want someone to say I'm making it from a woman's perspective only:

"Do you realistically see that happening, women like you making Jewish legal decisions in our times?"

> I want every woman to develop to her fullest potential. In the internal

"Women Have No Need To Scream"

Linda Gradstein, an advanced part-time student at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, tells her story:

I come from a traditional feminist background, where there are no differences between men and women, and anything men could learn, I could learn. My goal was to learn Gemara. That to me was the symbol of Jewish learning. What does it mean for today? The Gemara is the way people have tried to interpret the Torah. I almost dropped it three or four times: it was so difficult and I was so frustrated. I find it's fascinating but very male. The method of thinking is male: it seems to me that one of the problems in Torah is that there are really very few women who are learned enough but who are also feminine, who have a woman's approach to Torah, not a copy of the male approach.

My *hevruta* (study partner), Susan, is incredibly bright — she's the one who's pregnant and wears a head covering. We'll sometimes argue but there's not that edge of hostility. To learn Gemara you have to have an opinion and follow it through. But I think you can have intellectual strength and power without being competitive. I can argue a point with Susan, and if she proves to me that I'm wrong, I'll say, "You're right." We complement each other, we're each better at different things. I sense that when men learn, there's more competition: Who can learn more? Who can be right eight times out of ten? The Gemara is called the *milhamta*, a struggle. There is an intellectual struggle going on, but I don't think it has to be a battle. It can be a building together. I remember hearing Leah Shakdiel [a member of the Yeruham Religious Services Council who took her seat only after the Supreme Court decided a woman could not be denied membership] say that when her husband studied Gemara with her, he would scream at her. And when she asked why, he said that you have to scream when you study Gemara. She said that when women start really learning Gemara, women will find it is not necessary to scream. They will teach men they don't have to scream either.

way. On the other hand, I'm a practical person and I'm not a radical by any means, and what's going to happen externally I don't know. I don't like to create ruckuses. There's already so much friction and division in the Jewish nation that I don't want to cause any more. There will be many women *able* to write legal opinions, many women who know more what to do in their lives, how to instruct and tell other women. Whether it'll be time to do it or if it will be accepted by society, I don't know.

"Why do you think the power remains male?" I asked, thinking afterward that my question was as inane as asking why people liked chocolate.

But the question seemed reasonable to Malke.

In order really to be a rabbi of a community and a legal decisor, and to do it properly, you need full concentration, eighteen-hour days devoted to study and community work. I want to have the time to be with my children at meals, have discussions, and talk to my daughter about her ballet. Not that my husband doesn't want that, too, but he removes himself more. We are women. Women can do so many things. But this idea of ultimate power — in the rabbinic sense — and devotion to the community, the way it should be done properly — I think it's something a woman could do if she wished but naturally wouldn't want to. Up above, the scholars and the whole system think it's not healthy. Those women doing it will definitely suffer. Their families will suffer a lot.

Malke seemed satisfied to live out the "the woman's role" as defined by her religious community and did not see that role as limiting her aspirations in any way. She told me a story of a woman she admired, her brother's mother-in-law.

The rebbetzen is articulate and well versed in rabbinics, politics, history. She was married to a brilliant Talmudist, and they had four children. They were such articulate and dominant personalities that their marriage didn't work out and they were divorced. She then devoted herself to taking care of her ill father during his last years. He passed away, and she kept herself busy taking care of the children and maybe even had a little position here or there. The husband meanwhile remarried for a few years to a very fine woman, but the woman died and he was widowed and got sick with cancer of the lungs. It was very difficult. The four children, most of them with their own young children, were taking turns caring for their father. Their mother came to help take care of the children so they could go take care of the father. The father really needed someone with him around the clock and he didn't want a strange woman taking care of him. So he and his former wife remarried. She remarried him to help take care of him. Even if they couldn't get along on a day-to-day basis, she still had great respect and admiration for him. And it helped out her children. For a year and a half or two years she took care of him. It was very difficult. Then he passed away. A woman knew what she had to do and was able to do it.

I told Malke that her stance on "women's nature" would strike women, particularly those studying for the rabbinate in the progressive movements, as hopelessly conservative. That's how she struck me. Yet she spent her days learning and teaching Talmud. Regardless of her acceptance of the constraints of conventional wifely and motherly roles, regardless of her care not to do anything that could be construed as "bad for the Jews," she was, in the context of her community, a radical activist. Not only was she fashioning herself into a Talmudist, but she was also empowering other women by giving them the tools and the confidence to approach the texts themselves.

It wasn't clear to me whose glasses needed the fixing.

Malke smiled at my description of her as a renegade. It didn't mesh with her own self-image. Still, I think she was flattered. . . .

When I got around to making Malke's recipe for soup again, instead of winter kohlrabi and turnips, I substituted spring peas and green beans. Frying the onions and matzo meal together — her special trick — I recalled the last of her classes I had been to. Before she began to teach, Malke addressed us calmly, as if she were about to give an assignment. Her father had been suffering from back pain, and his doctors had decided to operate soon, to remove his kidney. Resting her hands on the open pages of her Talmud, she announced, "I'd like to dedicate today's learning to my father."

Once Jewish women could offer up only their prayers, good deeds, and charity to plead for the recovery of a loved one. Malke believed it was just as effective for a daughter of a Talmud scholar to offer Talmud study as a talisman for her father's health, so the merit of our learning might intercede for him in heaven. Unorthodox though the gesture may have been, Malke felt sure it was appropriate, for her father had always encouraged her to develop her intellect. When she was five, she told us, he would give her a difficult math problem such as nine times nine, and challenge her to work it out.

We returned to the tractate *Ketubbot*, to honest virgins, to lying brides, and to grooms deprived of their marital rights who wanted revenge. Out of respect for my teacher Malke, I postponed fretting about the problems I had with the maleness of Talmud.

When my attention drifted, which it inevitably did, to my family or to my teaching or to the texture of the upholstery that rubbed against the back of my legs, I tightened the screws of my concentration until no distractions could filter in.

My soup burned some, but the family enjoyed it nonetheless. Over the years they have grown accustomed to a burnt flavoring, like vanilla or curry, the spice of my distraction. L

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Into The Future *with Rituals from our Past*

Illustrations by Ellen Ait

Women's rituals have significantly matured over the last few years.

Suddenly it feels different. It's as if Jewish women, hobbled for millennia, are coming of age spiritually, beginning to march in unison into a promised land of our own.

The following two rituals are representative. Confident, centered, they radiate (generally unconsciously, which is an index of having entered a new paradigm) a quiet certainty — *a belief in their own normativeness*. Of the many signs of developmental maturity, this is the most striking. No longer angry, apologetic or awash in Otherness, these rituals proceed on some interesting fronts.

First, the ritual-makers feel entitled, as individuals and as women, to take their own pulses. As Diane Solomon frequently commented, "I did what felt right;" or, in Vicki Hollander's words, "I heeded my own voice and it ultimately felt very full, very satisfying." They have, in this way, created something that is simultaneously fresh and ancient.

Second, these women locate themselves in a decidedly Jewish place — not Buddhist, not Wiccan, not syncretistic. (Granted, it's re-sifted Judaism.) They've come to terms not only with their right to actively play Judaism, but also with their desire to be Jews.

Research in gender psychology has pointed out that women generally have a higher tolerance for change, flexibility, innovation and rule-breaking than do men. Vicki and Diane, in the ways they roll with the punches, seem to support this finding.

Vicki, for example, has only the barest idea of what her divorce ceremony will be. True, she invites her women friends over ahead of time, but potluck is as much a metaphor as a meal. Her "mourner's minyan" has hardly any agenda, but Vicki trusts that the essential bases will get covered. And they do. Following the rhythmic, sensuous imperatives of dusk and candles, she writes her document of release only hours before she needs it. Still, it is staunch and stunningly dignified.

As for Diane, when the spirit moves her, she takes her prayerbook out to the cemetery. If it's raining, the book gets wet. That's okay. In constructing her grief rituals, Diane consults no books or rabbis for the Letter of the Law; she finds and adapts her own little burial box (no phone calls to the funeral parlor).

Perhaps fresh air — the oxygen of change and freedom — is, after all, women's territory of grace.

Particularly given the larger framework of Jewish life cycle industrialization (mega-Bat Mitzvahs, etc.), the quality of "making do" here — of unmediated, small-scale praxis — is extraordinary.

Another subversive overhaul in these ceremonies (as in many others we have seen) has to do with the idea of community. For Jews, community is the basic coin of religious experience. For women, too, relationship has been said to be at the core of our very lives. But these rituals confound both of these constructs. Perhaps it is as the poet Marianne Moore has said: "The best cure for loneliness is solitude."

Though both Diane's husband and Vicki's women-friends are central to these women's religious, healing experiences, both Vicki and Diane spend marked, formal time alone.

Vicki chants the *viddui* by herself, wrapped in her *tallis*. Diane ritually gathers yarrow by herself in a field; she explicitly asks her community of friends and family not to phone.

Community here includes: the rhythms of nature and of the birthing body; the chain of generations that have come before; women in dyads; a Wordsworthian "sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused . . ."

Is, perhaps, our very definition of community — in this contemporary age — patriarchal, speciesist, lacking in imagination?

Finally, women's relationship to Judaism hinges on a certain dialectic: we claim Jewish traditions as important to us, but we also recognize how these traditions have antagonized, forgotten and even disfigured us.

For many women, this split has been paralyzing. Some women, however, like Vicki Hollander, are beginning to recover, to feel their way along the fissure. Increasingly, we are able to interpret the dichotomy as a rich, double source, a smorgasbord of possibility, an authentic High Holiday ticket to that larger, zygotic whole.

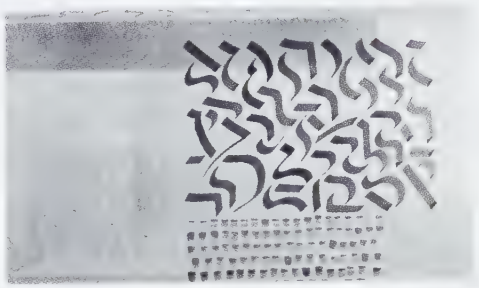
Interestingly, as new rituals discover their durable voices, they seem more and more homespun. Enfranchised women, after centuries of exclusion, may be quietly revolutionizing Judaism in a way not unlike the tectonic shift that occurred after the destruction of the Second Temple when animal sacrifice ceded to prayer.

Mark these words: the homespun is indeed subversive. *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur.* [With the name changed, this story could be about you.] L

— *Susan Schnur*

The New, Improved Jewish Divorce: *Hers/His*

by Vicki Hollander



When the phone rang with the news that my *get* (Jewish divorce) ceremony could take place the following day, I was ready. My civil divorce had come through several days earlier, but it hadn't made me feel divorced. I was the one, not David,* who had insisted that we have a traditional *get* as part of the divorce negotiations. We had been married ten years, separated one year. We had a beautiful four-year-old daughter. The ending of the marriage was, for me, painful and completely unexpected.

I know that many women feel hurt by the implicit sexism of the *get* ceremony, but I didn't feel that way. I wanted to stand before the entire Jewish community — including the most traditional — and have my new status declared and validated. I believed that a Jewish ceremony, unlike the civil event, might emotionally support me through a difficult transition: from being married to being single, from parenting as a couple to parenting alone.

I also knew that I had to construct a parallel ceremony. Five males (one rabbi, two witnesses, David and the scribe) would be present (along with myself) at the traditional *get* ritual. I decided to assemble my own cadre of supportive women friends. I worked out a schedule of guard-duty shifts [a *shomeret*] in which different friends would accompany me through the day. I also decided to write my own *get* document, to create my own customs for the day, and to construct my own sort of support-network *minyan* (quorum).

On the one hand I felt unspeakably sad and afraid; on the other, I felt strong and dignified, ready to claim this ancient ritual as my own, to recognize that the Jewish divorce ceremony was a route that was available to me for my own use in healing.

At dusk on the evening before the ceremony, I began a 24-hour fast: I lit a white candle and started to compose my own divorce document (what I call a "document of transition;" see p. 21) using special textured paper that I had bought for the occasion and a real ink pen. I was all alone, and I sat on the living room couch watching the candle flicker in the December dark, thinking, crying, preparing myself for the fact that tomorrow my marriage would be officially over. Going to bed that night, I felt quiet but not alone, in the grip of a large unfolding thing, but also feeling in control of what was about to happen.

The next morning, wrapped in my *tallis* (prayershawl), I said the *viddui*, a prayer of confession generally recited before one's marriage, on Yom Kippur and on one's death bed. I wanted to acknowledge my part in the death of my marriage — the patterns I had perpetuated that were not healthy, the skills I lacked, the times I had not listened to my intuitive voice.

Paralleling Yom Kippur, I wore no jewelry and no makeup. I dressed in white, the color of the *kittel*. (The *kittel*, a burial shroud, is also traditionally worn by Jewish men on their wedding day and on various Jewish holidays.) In a white skirt, white blouse and cloth shoes I felt bleached, cleansed, pure and present. White felt right to me, a symbol both of death and of rebirth.

I stayed alone until mid-morning, needing time to feel sad, to reflect, to be with God. I would have liked to have my family with me during parts of the day, but as my parents live in San Diego and my sister and brother-in-law in Cleveland that wasn't possible. My daughter had slept over at David's house and was now at school. I started to feel nervous and frightened, with a painful ache. So many relationships were now dying, and dreams, and parts of myself.

Joanne, my oldest friend in Seattle, picked me up at 10:30. We drove to the *shul*. Joanne sat by my side for about half an hour, through the first part of the ceremony. Around the large wooden table sat the two male witnesses, plus the officiating rabbi, the scribe and David. Except for the scribe, I knew everyone else in the room. I could feel their sympathy. There was small talk and joking around. I think they were afraid I would cry if there was much silence. Although as a woman I

* David is not his real name.

was legally powerless at this ceremony, I felt I had a great deal of authority. I had the power to get to the emotional core of the situation.

The ceremony began with the rabbi explaining the proceedings to us. He asked, formulaically, "Are you ready to go through with this?"

I answered, "Yes."

David answered, "Yes."

There was a terribly mournful feeling in the room.

After some more formalities, the officiating rabbi said we could leave for two hours while the scribe hand-wrote the *get*. Joanne drove me to my friend Bria's apartment. I had not yet shown anyone my "document of transition," and I wanted both to hear it read by someone else and to read it aloud myself. I hoped it would cut through the numbness. Hearing it and then reading it, I felt both grief and the beginnings of resolution.

Bria drove me back to the *shul*, where a third friend, Joanna (not Joanne), met me. We entered the room for the last part of the ceremony, watching the completion of the writing of the *get*, the artful, calligraphic document inscribed with infinite precision. The officiating rabbi read it aloud in Aramaic, then he cut the parchment with a small blade, symbolically cutting our union, giving concrete form to the ending of our marriage.

He gave the parchment to David who dropped it into my open hands. I tucked it in between my left arm and my heart, as I was instructed to do. Holding the ripped document near my heart felt like a real enactment of what was happening: this most close and intimate part of my life was over. One small gesture captured a year and a half of what I had been feeling.

I then gave this beautiful, disfigured parchment back to the officiating rabbi, relinquishing it. I walked the traditional three steps backwards and three steps forward, signifying my acceptance of the document. I didn't feel at all shamed by my allegedly "passive," distaff role in this proceeding. As I took the steps, I could physically feel myself standing tall and walking straight. It felt like the ceremony was mine.

I waited until the very end to hand David (my now ex-partner) my "document of transition." Though I had not gotten to hear my own document read aloud in this room, I had heard it read aloud with Bria, and I felt satisfied. I was glad to be performing the final, closing rite.

DOCUMENT
OF
TRANSITION

On the _____day of the week the _____day of _____ 574 _ since the creation of the world, the __day of _____ 199_ as we reckon time here in _____, _____
I, _____daughter of _____& _____,
(Hebrew names) _____
do depart from the bindings and vows of my marriage,
(kedushin) that took place _____years ago
on _____in _____
to _____, son of _____& _____,
(Hebrew names) _____

This day I am no longer bound to the task and to the commitment to cherish and honor you in faithfulness and in integrity as my husband.
This day I am no longer bound to stand as wife, companion, and partner.
This day I am no longer bound by honor or by law to affirm and maintain kedusha within our relationship.
This day I am no longer set aside, special to only you.
This day the kedushin vows become null and void.
I am no longer bound by the vows of kedushin.
Hereby, I am no longer kedusha to you, no longer your wife and you are no longer kadosh to me, no longer my husband.
On this day according to our tradition I depart as a free woman.
I stand as a free agent in the Jewish community, in the world, and before myself.
I stand having completed our people's traditional way of unbinding a marital relationship.
I stand as a Jewish woman with dignity and with strength.
I stand restored to a single unit as a whole and complete person.
This shall stand as a document of release and a letter of freedom in accordance with the values of our people, Israel.

_____(woman's Hebrew name)
_____(woman's English name)
_____Witness
_____Witness

*This document draws upon the ketubah, the get, and my own writings

The ceremony was over. It had felt foreign, yet greatly comforting. I was participating in an ancient ritual of unbinding, following in the path of many people who had passed before me who also had been hurting and torn.

Joanna drove me back to my apartment. Slowly I bathed, adapting the customs of mourning rituals in which water is the symbol of purification and renewal. I changed from my white clothes into comfortable, colored, happier clothes. I had bought myself a new pair of colored earrings for the occasion — a present to myself.

At around 5 p.m., eight additional women friends joined us, making a *minyan*. Each woman brought a dish for dinner. We had salads, casseroles, wine, bread, and almond tarts for dessert. The meal was a combination mourners' meal of consolation and of transition.

Lighting colored candles, we spoke of endings and of new beginnings, each of us spontaneously sharing some ending and beginning from our own lives. We sang the blessing over wine and talked about the meaning of this blessing — vines, rootedness, being connected with the earth, growth. It was a metaphor for our processes.

When we said the blessing over bread, we talked about how many coordinated actions are necessary to produce a loaf of bread — the finished product — no less the mystery of the initial grain. The talk was simple, which felt right. "I am not all alone," I said. "All of you have accompanied me through this difficult, coordinated process. Today marks not only the closure of my marriage, but formally recognizes how my friends have been with me through all of this." I thanked everyone, acknowledging that in my neediness through this crisis, I had made demands on my friends.

When we sang the *shehechiyanu* blessing (to mark my new beginning), we each reflected on what we wanted for ourselves now and in the future, what dreams we had. What new possibilities existed for me now? There had been so many changes. I was so aware of being a woman with women.

As the evening neared an end, we all went outside. Arm in arm, in small groups in the moonlight, reminiscent of the mourning ritual, we walked around the block. (At the end of sitting *shiva*, it is traditional to walk around the block, symbolizing the end of the mourning week.) My life's path would now be different.

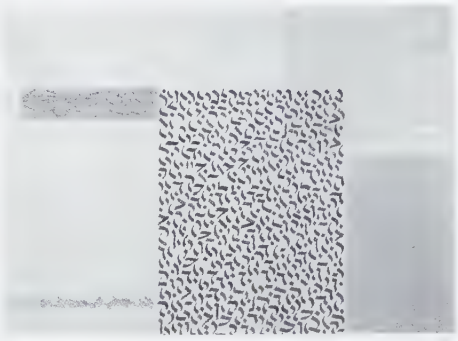
When we came back to my apartment building, we formed a circle on the lawn. I talked briefly and quietly about my feelings throughout the day. Then we hugged and parted.

The ritual had begun at dusk and it ended at dusk. I felt very full, very satisfied. The day had, after all, been mine. L

Vicki Hollander is a Reform rabbi who has served in Conservative, Reform and Havurah communities. She is currently getting her certification in marriage and family therapy. She writes new rituals.

A Midwife's Kaddish

by Diane Solomon



The first time I became pregnant my husband and I were living in a Native American fishing village. Scott, a physician, was serving a two-year stint with the Indian Health Service, while I, a nurse-midwife, was consulting and writing. Our backyard was the Strait of Juan de Fuca off the tip of Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. It was remote and beautiful.

Early in the pregnancy, during a visit to Portland, I decided to go to the *mikvah* (ritual bath). I had gone twice before in my life, once after recovering from surgery and once on the eve of my wedding. This time it was particularly special to float in the *mikvah* because I felt new life spreading within me, floating in its own waters. I stepped out of the *mikvah* really *believing* I was pregnant in a way that was different from before.

During my thirteenth week I began spotting. Terrified, Scott and I drove down to his clinic to listen to the fetus' heartbeat with the Doppler stethoscope. There was the soft *swish-swish* of my steady pulse, but where was the *tat-tat-tat-tat* we longed to hear? All we heard was a silence.

Going home, we climbed into bed together and cried. Scott, who is Unitarian, asked me if we were supposed to rend our clothes. (In the context of our home life, our traditions are Jewish; besides, no Unitarian rituals came to mind.) Scott's question gave me pause. Why were there no formal Jewish ways to mark this sad passing? Until 40 days of pregnancy, a loss is considered inconsequential in Judaism, but what of *after* 40 days? Was miscarriage so common through the ages that women simply accepted it as a given? Did my Jewish foremothers somehow keep themselves from becoming attached to their fetuses? Or did they simply learn to suppress their feelings of loss in the context of a tradition which did not acknowledge such loss? Regardless, Scott and I felt primally attached to this pregnancy, and now we were utterly desolate. We lay in bed and clung to each other.

The following day, to confirm our diagnosis, we drove 90 minutes on serpentine roads to Port Angeles and the nearest ultrasound machine. I turned my head away when I saw the unmistakable fetus on the ultrasound screen, but Scott kept watching. "I could see his little arms. His poor little arms held up against his face . . . ," Scott blurted out on our way back to the car. Scott's voice cracked as he mimicked the gesture of the fetus.

Though we are both vehemently pro-choice, we decided we could not bear to have this pregnancy concluded by medical technology. Instead, we went to a health-food store, bought up all the potions, teas and tablets I knew of to stimulate uterine contractions, and went home to Neah Bay to wait for my body to pass the fetus.

For five days I picked yarrow flowers and brewed them into a vile tea. Yarrow is a time-honored abortifacient (which, by the way, must be used with extreme caution) that grows wild in Neah Bay. Like the *mikvah*, which reaffirms the relationship between women and water, harvesting yarrow became another reclaimed ritual for me. I knew that Indian women had forgotten about the use of this herb, so I felt like I was rekindling a relationship, almost a covenant, between nature and womankind. Meanwhile, I continued to drink tinctures, massage acupressure points, visualize and pray that my body and spirit could let go of this fetus.

I questioned the Jewish custom of *shiva* (mourning surrounded by other) because all I wanted was to be alone — inside myself and with Scott. Through the grapevine we let people know not to call us for a while, but we began to receive wonderful, warming cards from friends and family.

In the midst of all this, I thanked God that my body was getting a chance to 'prove' itself. If I couldn't maintain the pregnancy, at least I was getting a chance to know my body might be 'right' enough to pass this fetus. For me, waiting gave me time to finish with this pregnancy, to savor our last connection, gain closure and grieve.

Finally, on the fifth night, my uterus began to contract. Strangely, I went into the altered state I often tell my patients is "the labor planet." I found myself not being able to talk in full sentences, getting hot, then cold, needing to move constantly, snapping at Scott for his audacity in not being inside my brain to anticipate my every need . . . .

Soon it was over, and Scott put on his gloves to 'deliver' the fetus. "Good work, Diane," he whispered gently. "You did it. Everything is here." The tiny fetus was attached to cord and placenta, and all delivered at once. It was just past midnight.

I took a shower while Scott opened a bottle of saline. He poured some of the fluid into a plastic bag to keep the fetus moist until morning. She (like her mother) would feel at home in the waters. Our fetus had a hint of a smile, but it was clear it also had severe anomalies. My body had done the right thing, and our sadness softened a bit with that knowledge.

Scott brought out a bottle of wine that we'd received just ten months before at our wedding. We both felt a great need to say a *bracha* (blessing), and so we said one over the wine. Suddenly, we felt released. We had made it, we could let go of this tiny being that we loved, mark this wrenching passing and go on.

"You have to tell me what to do, Diane," Scott said. "This baby is Jewish, after all." Scott's words welled up inside me: He was confirming his commitment to our Jewish family — a new entity.

"You're not supposed to wait more than 24 hours to bury a body," I said. I felt strongly that I wanted to follow this particular Jewish injunction, though I knew how willing I was to ignore others.

The next day I prepared a tiny box that once contained a rose quartz bolo tie that friends had given me as a gift for ushering their daughter into the world. Somehow that was the right receptacle. Scott took the tiny form out of the fluid and placed it gently within the cotton padding. With a shovel, a *siddur* (prayerbook), my journal, a bundle of yarrow, and a rose, we drove to the nearby Indian tribal graveyard, the only cemetery in Neah Bay. A tall totem pole marked the entrance.

Choosing a cedar tree at the back, we dug a hole beneath its protecting branches and choked through the *kaddish*. Scott read a poem of mine from my journal, then I placed the yarrow on top of the box. We both said a few words to the fetus, and cried.

"I think we toss some dirt on it now, Scott," I said, adding awkwardly, "but I'm not sure if that's Jewish or not." Suddenly I realized how unconventional our path was. We had consulted no one — seen no specialist, phoned no rabbi, read no books. We knew enough to maintain power over the physiology of this process, and now I saw how I'd used this same approach with our spiritual journey. Where there was no set custom, we wove our own.

Finally, we both threw in a handful or two of soil and a sprig of cedar as we thought the Indians might do. It felt serene and right in their cemetery in Neah Bay.

Walking down the hill, we gazed back again and again to the spot beneath the cedar marked with a rose. Before we moved away from Neah Bay we came back often, to sit and sometimes say *kaddish*.

"Someday you'll have brothers and sisters," Scott had said during our little ceremony. "And we'll be sure to tell them about you."

The *kaddish* page in our prayer book is permanently wrinkled with rain and salt water, and that feels just as it should be. L

Diane N. Solomon is a certified nurse-midwife and writer who lives with her husband in Hood River, Oregon.

The artwork detailed on the preceding pages is from a series of Hebraic art by Ellen Alt, based on the design of the Talmud.

...And an anthropologist says... *by Riv-Ellen Prell*

One of the things that strikes me powerfully about these two rituals — and these rituals are deeply moving to me — is how different they are from rituals that were created in the 1970's and 1980's. Then, when we chose to "own" rituals by creating versions that experimented with our own voices in the tradition, we tended to focus on *Shabbat*, on weddings and on births.

These rituals, on the other hand, focus on loss — on death and on divorce — recognizing both a literal loss and a loss of dreams and a future. We have grown up and expanded the life cycle. We have grown old, life is weightier, and we need more rituals to bring our new experiences to a tradition which sometimes overlooks us and the significant moments in our lives.

A feminist Judaism learns from personal experience. When our enlarging lives confront ritual, we (like all people) need to search again for our own image and our own voice in the traditions we inherit. Vicki Hollander and Diane Solomon have done that, creating rituals which reflect their lives.

There's an interesting difference here between Vicki and Diane. Vicki is a rabbi and Diane's a laywoman. As a rabbi, Vicki has a large Jewish vocabulary. She knows how to create an alternative document, how to borrow metaphors from Yom Kippur or from mourning rituals. But Diane, with a smaller vocabulary, still has a profoundly Jewish experience. Diane wants to say the *kaddish* at her fetus' burial; she and her husband want a Jewish "death." Diane calls on Jewish symbols and liturgy to put her miscarriage into the Jewish lifecycle. It's important to note that the act of appropriating ritual is not only for the experts.

Neither of these rituals constitutes an attack on broadly conceived Jewish authority, and this feels new to me too. These women are simply trying to make their own claims, to find their own places. Part of the success and beauty and authenticity in these rituals comes from the fact that there is no anger here. Diane and Vicki are focusing on how to find their own spaces within Judaism, how to connect themselves to the Jewish people.

These are stunningly successful undertakings. They feel authentic because they are emotionally satisfying, and you can feel each woman's transformation — the essence of a rite of passage.

After reading these stories, I felt spiritually impoverished. Vicki's and Diane's close attention to themselves, to their needs, and to their Judaism inspires me to take less for granted and to create more.

Riv-Ellen Prell is an anthropologist in the American Studies Program at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of Prayer & Community: The Havurah in American Judaism *(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) and co-editor with the Personal Narratives Group of* Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory & Personal Narratives *(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).*

Continued from page 7

access to lesbian or gay marriages; yet even if they cannot marry "according to the law of Moses," many of the writers long for some ceremony to legitimize and celebrate commitment to partners.

A few of the essays are by homosexual parents, parents of homosexuals, gay and lesbian rabbis. A heterosexual rabbi describes working at a gay and lesbian congregation in California. Another rabbi, still closeted, adopts a Spanish pseudonym — "La Escondida", the hidden woman — whose dream of integration seems tragically not likely to be fulfilled. She lives a "bifurcated life," tormented by secrecy, honest with the occasional lesbian or gay in her congregation, and longing to be "safe and valued in a world" that will "fully accept" her. She shares her traditional Jewish prayer with the reader: "May this day come speedily and in our time."

These narratives are painful, but, by and large ("La Escondida" aside), they are all "success stories." People come out and find God and community again. I miss, in the terrible earnestness of these essays, a leavening sense of humor. I miss ambiguity. I miss the raw edges of *Nice Jewish Girls*, Evelyn Torton Beck's 1982 lesbian collection.

Just as humor is missing, so too is anger. Only Rofes speaks much about his anger, which he attempts to defuse. ("I wondered whether Jews were simply angrier than others.") But anger — given these accounts of homophobia and rising anti-Semitism — is precisely the appropriate response. Were Balka and Rose afraid of scaring off straight readers? The Broadway musical tone in many of these essays (suggesting a suppressed anger) makes the book somewhat bland and repetitive. The very omission of anger is, paradoxically, the volume's most poignant characteristic.

The essays on Jewish tradition are quite powerful. Rebecca T. Alpert analyzes Leviticus 18:22 which calls homosexuality an abomination (*to'evah*). Interestingly, the term applies to men and not to women — lesbians are, as so often women are — invisible.

In an impassioned, witty essay that expresses the heart of *Twice Blessed*, Judith Plaskow claims that "we cannot suppress sexual feelings without suppressing our capacity for feeling in general.... Sexuality is profoundly connected to spirituality.... .The bonds of community are erotic bonds."

"Unlike the garden of Eden," she writes, "where Eve and Adam are ashamed of their nakedness and women's subordination is the punishment for sin, the garden of the Song of Songs is a place of sensual delight and sexual equality." In that garden of tolerance and celebration, the reader — gay or straight — can find solace.

Now that we are revising prayerbooks to deemphasize the masculine god of previous generations, texts should also be revised to include homosexuals. For example, the prayerbook of New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah translates the much-used word *yeshua* (redemption) as "liberation," making overt "the connection between the liberation of gay and lesbian people and Jewish messianic hope," writes Rabbi Yoel H. Kahn.

The volume ends with an extremely valuable list of resources, workshop suggestions, and bibliographies — of great value to teachers, rabbis, and fair-minded congregations. *Twice Blessed* convinces us that we can all be enlarged by reaching out to embrace our Jewish diversity.

— JJH

The Great Letter E
by Sandra Schor
Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1990
224 pp., $18.95

The hero of Sandra Schor's first novel, *The Great Letter E*, is a man who refuses to take the wheel and steer his own life, preferring to cower in the back seat with a copy of Spinoza's *Ethics*. After discovering that his wife is having an affair with a friend he has known since childhood, Barry Glassman passively watches as his family disintegrates. His sensitive, thirteen-year-old son runs away from home — suffering under the weight of Barry's philosophical obsession and moral absence. Barry himself slowly falls to pieces like a termite-ridden chair, consoling himself with syllogisms about the universal grain of the wood.

In the workaday world, Barry is a fair-to-middling optometrist with a dwindling practice, an Everyman from Bayside, Queens, New York, who worries that the external necessities of his existence may "perforate the delicate web of [his] internal life." Rather than bear the sharp, tearing prick of his own inadequacy, Barry withdraws to a drafty rented room to live amid reveries of Spinoza's life.

The novel's first-person narration immerses us in Barry's consciousness, that braying, changeable, unreasonably reasonable instrument. In doing so, Schor risks estranging her reader. Barry's querulousness drives his own rabbi to slug him at one point in the novel. This is a move which the reader may well applaud.

By pitching us headlong into the turbulent motion of her protagonist's mind, Schor winds up giving short shrift to the women who figure in Barry's life. His wife, Marilyn, and the brilliant physicist, Enid (whom he takes as a lover), both seem preternaturally concerned with having more babies. Schor does nothing to mitigate Barry's contempt for his wife. Marilyn remains a stock figure — inherited like an ill-fitting shoe from the comic novels of Jewish male writers — convicted of maternity, materialism, and *meshugas* (craziness).

Barry himself is something quite different; his infuriating and vital need for a philosophical slide rule to help him master life's tragic subtractions differentiates him from the numb, divorced men we know from the fictions of John Updike and Richard Ford. Barry strikes a chord in us because he's an ordinary schmo with an incurable sweet tooth for Spinoza's philosophy.

He wrestles with the irrational in religious man: the belief that because one loves God, it is only right and proper that God should reciprocate the sentiment. If he ultimately is pinned to the mat by his own egoism, at least he learns to recognize and accept his own failings.

In *The Great Letter E*, Sandra Schor has created a little man with gargantuan preoccupations. That's no mean feat for a first novel.

— Pamela Renner

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HELPING POOR WOMEN AFFORD ABORTIONS

When it comes to abortion rights, Jewish women have decided to put their money where their mouths are. A new fund, organized by Jewish women in South Florida, will help pay for abortions for women who otherwise can't afford the procedure.

The Women's Emergency Network is the brainchild of Jeri B. Cohen, a lawyer from North Miami Beach. Cohen decided to start the fund after realizing that much of the current debate over abortion rights has not really addressed the needs of poor women with unwanted pregnancies.

Since 1977, the U.S. Congress has prohibited the use of federal Medicaid funds to pay for abortions unless the life of the mother is in imminent danger. And while fourteen other states and the District of Columbia have opted to use state funds to pay for the procedure, Florida has not.

"The whole thing is unconscionable," Cohen says. "There's a constitutional right, but poor women can't exercise it."

The network, which includes physicians, abortion providers, politicians, social workers and a rabbi, hopes to raise $50,000 this year to help fund abortions for several hundred needy women. Next year, the fund aims to double its size.

The North Dade chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, of which Cohen is a member, has also pledged its support for the network. As one of its major projects this year, the 250-member chapter will raise funds and keep statistics for the new program.

Since its establishment earlier this year, the network has helped pay for abortions for nearly twenty poor women. One of the first grant recipients was a seventeen-year-old Nicaraguan woman who became pregnant as a result of being raped. Another woman helped by the network was a pregnant eighteen-year-old who already had given birth to two children who were in foster care.

"I view my fund, optimistically, as a stopgap," Cohen says. "We're doing what the government should be doing."

Social service agencies and health care providers are informing poor women about the network. The fund gives the pregnant woman a grant, but she is also expected to contribute a small amount of her own money for the abortion. She is also required to sign a written pledge that she will return to the clinic for family planning services and follow-up care.

Cohen says the network is modeled after a fifteen-year-old fund administered by another Jewish woman, Harriette Glasner of North Palm Beach. The 84-year-old Glasner, who also founded a Planned Parenthood chapter in Palm Beach County, started her fund with the proceeds of the sale of her diamond bracelet. Glasner says her $25,000 annual fund has provided grants to cover the full cost of an abortion for thousands of women over the years.

The two Florida funds aren't the only programs to work on behalf of poor women with unwanted pregnancies. According to the National Abortion Rights Action League, women have organized similar funds in eighteen other states and the District of Columbia.

For more information about the Network, or to make a contribution, write: The Women's Emergency Network, Inc., PO Box 1852, Hallandale, FL 33008. Contributions to Glasner's fund, Emergency Medical Assistance, Inc., should be sent to PO Box 2065, West Palm Beach, FL 33402.

— Ellen Flax

WOMEN DIRECT MOSCOW FILM FESTIVAL

Two West Coast women are responsible for the first Jewish Film Festival to take place in Moscow in recent memory, and of the 30 films shown, 11 were directed by women.

The two, Deborah Kaufman and Janice Plotkin, got the idea for the festival while working to obtain Russian films for the 1988 San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.

The Soviets were interested in reciprocating and requested films like "Fiddler on the Roof," "The Ten Commandments" and "Portnoy's Complaint." According to Kaufman, they didn't have any idea that other Jewish-content films were available.

Plotkin explained that most people in the Soviet Union have little information about Jews and Jewish culture. "Their notion of

BRINGING FEMINISM TO CAMP RAMAH

As a counselor for thirteen-year-old girls at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires (New York) last summer, I felt it my responsibility to present a Judaism which is as inclusive of women as of men. However, since Camp Ramah is affiliated with the Conservative movement, there was a limit as to how far I could go.

I decided to focus in on the *"Birkat Hamazon"* ("Grace After Meals"). In the second section of the blessing — third on Shabbat — there is a list of reasons for which we are thankful to God. Included in this list are: being given the Land of Israel, being taken out of bondage in Egypt and being taught the Torah. But, for me, the problematic item on this list is *"Veh'al brit'cha sheh'chatamta beev'sareynu"* ("and for the covenant that you have sealed in our flesh").

Although we must dig deeply to feel as if we, ourselves, had been taken out of Egypt, there is a limit as to how far one can dig. As women, there is nothing in our Jewish experience that includes the highly personal occurrence of having a covenant sealed in our flesh. None of us has been circumcised.

Last year I studied in Israel, and it was there that I met a woman — through the Women of the Wall — who explained the significance of this line. As women, she told me, we have to be aware of liturgical exclusion. She suggested her reformulation: *"Veh'al brit'cha sheh'chatamta b'leebeynu"* ("and for the covenant that you have sealed in our hearts"). I liked it and started using it.

I must confess, the religious consciousness of thirteen-year-old girls is not at peak level, and I was careful not to bombard them with too much innovation. I introduced this line change as something I had decided on personally and gave them the reasons why I thought it was important, allowing them to ask me any questions they had. There was some resistance, but happily a good number of the girls made the effort to implement the change. The beauty of the new words is that they fit perfectly into the tune.

Obviously there are many revisions to be made in order for the liturgy to be more inclusive of the female experience. Representation of the matriarchs alongside the patriarchs is one more way to balance the scale. There is a long way to go, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. We are on our way.

— Hope Berger

Jewish life is *shtetl* nostalgia."

Close to 50,000 people attended the festival, which was held in late March. The women were even interviewed on "Good Evening Moscow," a widely viewed television talk show. After the show, people everywhere came up to them and identified themselves as Jews or half-Jews.

"Many of the people we met are planning on staying in the USSR," Plotkin explained. "Many have left. The festival is a catalyst to empower the Jews who plan to stay."

Kaufman and Plotkin were careful to present movies that didn't exploit women. "We made a totally conscious effort to go beyond Jewish stereotypes," Kaufman explained. "A major purpose was to provide alternative images of Jews."

SYNAGOGUES SPONSOR AIDS DINNERS

At long last, mainstream synagogues are beginning to offer special programs for People With AIDS (PWA's) and their families.

One such program is taking place at B'nai Jeshurun on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where 120 PWA's and their families attended a seder this past Passover. The hagadah was enriched to include ten contemporary plagues, as well as "Four Children Confronting Illness." ("What kind of child am I in my illness? Angry? Silent? What kinds of questions do I ask?")

Eating *maror* and *charoset* prompted reflections on "how bitterness and sweetness inevitably blend together in life," and people shared memories as others cheered and sang, according to Rolando Matalon, associate rabbi of the congregation. "People could be who they are. Many gays were openly being themselves in a Jewish setting for the first time," he said.

One woman, whose daughter, son-in-law and grandchild have AIDS, shared how her husband risked his life in the Warsaw ghetto procuring matzah for Passover. "This seder was one of the most powerful spiritual experience I ever had," Matalon said.

B'nai Jeshurun, a Conservative synagogue, also sponsors bimonthly Shabbat luncheons and special afternoon prayer services in which the theme is "home and comfort."

At Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, also on Manhattan's Upper West Side, dinner is provided weekly for 100 PWA's. During the same hours, the Reform synagogue holds a clothing exchange, food distribution program and counseling sessions for PWA's and their families.

In Los Angeles, three separate projects which provide brunches to AIDS patients at area hospitals are currently taking place. Five congregations — four Reform and one Conservative — serve brunch monthly at the Sherman Oaks Community Hospital. They also bring "feel better" cards made by children in their congregations, according to Janet Marder, assistant director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in the Pacific Southwest Council.

Another such program is being run at the Kaiser Hospital on Sunset Boulevard. There, volunteers from the five Reform congregations also visits patients in their rooms if they are too sick to eat, Marder explained.

A third program, at County-USC Medical Center, is geared to outpatients. Marder explained that the outpatient population at this hospital is largely indigent. "They line up for hours before the brunch, waiting for food," Marder said of the weekly lunches.

The LA programs are not restricted to Jewish PWA's, according to Marder. In fact, initially staff at County-USC Medical Center had been apprehensive about that program, fearing that the coalition of synagogues involved was seeking to proselytize, she said.

MAZAL TOV

CYNTHIA OZICK, fiction author and critic, and SISTER ROSE THERING, executive director of the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, were the recipients in May, of the Sam Levenson "Woman of Valor" Award, given during Jewish Heritage Week in New York.

ALICE SHALVI, head of the Israel Women's Network and prominent modern Orthodox educator and feminist, received the Emil Gruenzweig Award from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

MYRNA SHINBAUM has been appointed director of the Anti-Defamation League's newly created Soviet Jewry Project, which will work in conjunction with the Confederation of Jewish Organizations and Communities of the USSR (VAAD) to expose, analyze and combat anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.

DOLORES KOSBERG WILKENFELD of Houston, TX, was elected chairperson of the North American Board of the World Union of Progressive Judaism, which represents more than one million Reform Jews in the United States and Canada.

UJA MISSION TO ISRAEL INCLUDES FEMINIST BUS

LILITH Board Member Barbara Dobkin led a busload of women (and a couple of men) on a New York UJA-sponsored mission to Israel in April. What made this group's agenda unique in UJA history was the feminist focus of their tour.

"We saw first hand what an underclass Israeli women have become," Dobkin said. "They're behind in health care — for example, it's very difficult even to get a mammogram. The discrimination against women in employment shock all of us."

Dobkin, who insisted on a substantive program, arranged for feminist educator Alice Shalvi, head of the Israel Women's Network, to act as scholar-in-residence for the tour. The group as also met with women active in political, in the nascent social change movement in Israel and with kibbutz women activists.

"We intend to have continuing dialogue with these women," said Dobkin on her return.

Dobkin's "women's issues" bus was part of a larger mission of close to 1,000 New Yorkers.

OBITS

ROSE KUSHNER author, journalist and outspoken advocate for the rights of breast cancer patients died of breast cancer last January at age 59.

LEONORE SIEGELMAN, a longtime activist in promoting Black-Jewish relations, died in Washington last January at the age of 70. A retired economist with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, she founded the American-Israel Committee to Commemorate Martin Luther King Jr., and was scheduled to receive the 1990 Civil Rights Award at the fifth annual King commemoration at the Israel Embassy.

T.V. MEN: WIMPS OR WHAT?

It's a bad year for Jewish men. As portrayed on prime-time television this season, they're a bunch of nice nebbishes. From Miles Silverberg, "Murphy Brown"'s insecure producer, to contentedly neurotic Marty Gold on "Anything But Love," to sensitive, self-absorbed Michael Stedman on "thirtysomething," to Stuart Markowitz, "L.A. Law"'s prime nudge, Jewish men are being depicted as good-hearted but weak.

Miles (played by Grant Shaud) worries aloud. Marty (Richard Lewis) shlumps around. Michael (Ken Olin) whines and Stuart (Michael Tucker) pouts. As for Jackie Mason, well, he was in a category by himself.

It wasn't always like this.

I used to watch Mick Belker (played by Bruce Weitz), the tough, dedicated cop, and Henry Goldblum (Joe Spano), the serious, introspective lieutenant, on "Hill Street Blues." "St. Elsewhere" had practical Wayne Fiscus (Howie Mandel), an intern who practiced in a Red Sox cap, and philosophical Dr. Auschlander (Norman Lloyd), the hospital administrator. Lt. Bert Samuels (Al Waxman) was a fair, decisive authority figure on "Cagney & Lacey" and Dr. Sidney Freedman (Allan Arbus) was "M*A*S*H"'s wise, compassionate psychiatrist.

I knew these men were Jewish because periodically they'd mention a grandson's *bar mitzvah,* say *kaddish* for their fathers or celebrate Chanukah. However, their religion was incidental to the roles they played on the programs: that of capable men who did their jobs well and were respected because of it.

The difference with this year's crop of Jewish men is that although they are also outstanding in their fields (Marty's the star writer on a Chicago magazine, Stuart's a partner in a prestigious law firm, Miles produces a network news program, Michael is an executive at a top advertising agency), that's not what makes them noteworthy.

The emphasis is on Marty's uncertainties, Miles' insecurities, Stuart's need to be in control and Michael's endless self-analysis. The men are caricatures of "weak Jewish men" – even if affectionately or gently drawn. What seems to make something like Stuart's worrywart neurosis acceptable (spending hours in unnecessary color-coding and cross-filing in preparation for his first court appearance) is that it's done in a manner that's intended to be endearing and humorous, not ethnically maligning.

Courtesy NBC

Stuart Markowitz (Michael Tucker) of "LA Law"

For some reason, Miles seems to get it the worst. On a recent episode, his BMW is hit by four different people in the course of a few days. After each dent, Miles throws a tantrum. "God is punishing me for buying a German car," he shouts at one point. Exasperated with his histrionics, Corky (Faith Ford) finally says, "Oh, Miles, *zei un mensch!*" – only she says it in English: "Oh Miles, be a man!"

However, could it be that as long as Miles doesn't behave "like a man" he is safe? Could it be that television writers – so many of whom are Jewish – don't want Jewish men to be seen as threatening arrivistes? Are the writers subliminally saying, "Don't worry, national television audiences, Jewish men in influential positions are nothing to be afraid of. On the contrary, they're just overgrown teddy bears who need a reassuring hug. They're not taking over. No way."

Perhaps this is why we constantly see Marty holding his head and making references to his mother and his psychiatrist, Michael griping about the difficulties of being a "grownup," Miles looking to Murphy (Candice Bergen) for reassurance that he made the right decision, and Stuart preoccupied with irrelevant details.

None of this would be that remarkable – after all, there are plenty of Christian schlemiels on T.V. this year, too – except for the fact that these are the only Jewish male characters on network television that I'm aware of. I am sensitive to how my own ethnic group is portrayed.

I liked it when, in T.V. years gone by, I felt respect for Jewish males — the Mick Belkers and Dr. Freedmans, even the Henry Goldblums and Dr. Auschlanders. This year's sample is not so respectable.

Interestingly, the Jewish women that I've seen on T.V. this year — Melissa (Melanie Mayron) on "thirtysomething" and Lilith (Bebe Neuhirth) on "Cheers" and Victor's girlfriend Amy on "L.A. Law" — are self-possessed and independent, without a trace of Rhoda or Molly Goldberg in them.

A freelance photographer, Melissa grapples with personal problems, but, unlike Michael, she resolves them and lives with her decisions. When filmmaker Amy is raped, she refuses to blame herself or feel guilty, and leaves Victor when he is less than completely supportive. As for witty, confident Lilith, if she's a caricature, it's of a rationalizing psychiatrist, not of a Jewish woman.

But, of course, women — even Jewish women — are never as threatening as men.

Maria Stieglitz is a freelance writer living in Sea Cliff, NY who is a great fan of Mick Belker, Lt. Samuels and Wayne Fiscus.

RECONSIDERING "MS. DAISY"

"Driving Miss Daisy," a skillfully made and beautifully performed movie, is essentially a feel-good film about our most searing problem: race relations. Who wouldn't wish that current tensions between Jews and Blacks (confrontations around Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, Ed Koch and many others) could be resolved as sweetly as those between Hoke, an utterly forebearing and courtly Black man played by Morgan Freeman, and Miss Daisy (Jessica Tandy), a difficult, tight-fisted old Jewish lady with progressive civil-rights sympathies?

Why the white family in the film should be defined as Jewish — apart from the fact that the portrait of Daisy is built on writer Alfred Uhry's own grandmother — doubtless relates to Jews' historical identification with Blacks. More than once the film equates the sufferings of both groups, as in the scene that parallels the burning of a present-day Jewish temple with a long-ago lynching of a childhood friend's father. To suggest, however, that Blacks and Jews are now, or have been in the past, in exactly the same boat, is extremely simplistic and has little relevance to the real issues out there.

The deepening bond at the film's center — Miss Daisy taking Hoke's hand and calling him her best friend, or Hoke, in the last sequence, spoon-feeding Miss Daisy — is guaranteed to fill us with emotion. Director Beresford has a gift for sharply honing in on small human truths; what might have been sentimental is not rendered so. Nevertheless, the story of these two old people — joined across race by ties of aging, shared experience and humanity — ultimately is too easy and too neat. The film is, finally, like a carefully calibrated, very high-level TV drama. The setting is comfortably, reassuringly distanced from painful present-day complexities.

If there is any brave truth in "Driving Miss Daisy," it has to do with old age. Built as the film is, entirely around a very old woman — no youthful eroticism, no violence — this is utterly unlikely material for commercial American cinema. What makes this picture of the anguish of old age commercially feasible is the feistiness of the heroine, her resistance to help offered, her prickly, sassy remarks.

Jewish feminists might see stereotyping here: the Jewish mother has always been viewed by male Jewish writers as difficult — and presumably much more difficult as she becomes older (even though it's also possible that Uhry's grandmother was exactly as difficult as the character here portrayed). At any rate, the old lady as an impossible crotchety character is the running joke of the film. The two men continually exchange looks of amusement and make gentle jokes at her expense, although they do so carefully.

Though we all doff our hats towards certain older spirited women, I think it's hard for feminists to find this particular crustiness attractive: Miss Daisy's always wanting to do everything herself, refusing to accept correction until the advising person's back is turned, never admitting to any vulnerability. Because we have no sense of how Daisy has forged a self-possessed identity (we only have a glimpse of her playing mah-jongh and going to temple), we can't attribute her personality to valor.

What *does* work well, though, is Daisy's sass seen in the context of the struggle against old age. When Daisy's facade collapses — in the couple of scenes at the film's conclusion in which Daisy is finally fully defeated by the deterioration of age — it is painful and shocking. She slips from full alertness to dissociation, from testy control to total loss of control. The one snappy, critical thrust she makes at her son leads Hoke to call this "one of her good days." This, indeed, is how Daisy's crustiness has functioned throughout the film: making the pain of old age bearable for a mass audience.

As Hollywood goes, "Driving Miss Daisy" may look like mature and serious filmmaking, a venture that's way out on a limb. But everything, of course, is relative. The film ducks current realities in many ways, by setting itself in the less ambiguous past and by focusing on the least threatening of racial arenas: an ultimately fair-minded, old lady and an elderly Southern gentleman.

In time-honored tradition, the Black man is carefully placed beyond sexuality and is cast as helper and servant. His muttered ironies and his assertions of his rights are calculated to ruffle no one's feathers. And, again, difficult old Jewish mothers/grandmothers are always fair game.

So although "Driving Miss Daisy" has been uniformly applauded, I continue to sit on my hands. L

Barbara Quart has written Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema *(New York: Praeger, 1988) and many articles and reviews for such publications as* Ms., The Nation, Film Quarterly *and* Midstream. *She teaches at the College of Staten Island, CUNY.*

TSENA RENA

"Go and See" or "Seek Enlightenment" is the title of the Yiddish-language Torah for women, with the portion of the week and folk tales. Tsena-Rena was the first resource that enabled women to educate themselves.

FURTHER READING

Creative dance and movement ideas for interpreting Torah verses are available in **TORAH IN MOTION: CREATING DANCE MIDRASH.** Available for $22.50 plus $3.75 postage from *A.R.E. Publishing Inc./3945 S. Oneida Street/Denver, CO 80237.* Contact JoAnne Tucker, *Avodah, Inc./243 Fifth St. #9/Jersey City, NJ 07302.*

photo by Tom Brazil

Two companion publications *Chart Your Course: Career Planning for Young Women* and *Building Partnerships: Career Exploration in the Workplace* describe model programs that **PREPARE FEMALES FOR THE COMPETITIVE BUSINESS WORLD.** $12 plus $2 postage for both from *Education Development Center/Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center/55 Chapel St./Newton, MA 02160.*

The American Jewish Committee has reissued the 1984 booklet **JEWISH VIEWS ON ABORTION** by Rabbi David M. Feldman. $1.50 from *AJC/165 E. 56th St./New York, NY 10022.*

The historical role that volunteers have played in pioneering social change in America is included in **FACTS ABOUT VOLUNTEERS** from *The National Council of Jewish Women/Order Department/53 W. 23rd St./New York, NY 10010.*

A JEWISH WOMEN'S CALL FOR PEACE is a handbook of resources to promote discussion on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Published by Firebrand Press, the 72-page booklet is available for $4.95 from the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation, which benefits from the proceeds. *JWCEO/163 Joralemon St. Suite 1178/Brooklyn, NY 11201.*

ORGANIZING TEACH-INS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE urges serious consideration of a two-state solution. This booklet has an extensive bibliography and a list of Middle East peace organizations. $2.50 from the *International Jewish Peace Union/Box 20854/Tompkins Square Station, New York, NY 10009.*

A sourcebook of guidelines for Jewish Community Centers and Y's on the subject of **AIDS** sets the problem in a Jewish context and includes a comprehensive list of resources. *Jewish Welfare Board/Saul Levenshus, Health, Physical Education and Recreation Consultant/15 E. 26th St./New York, NY 10010.*

Find out about how you can **SAFEGUARD THE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC SECURITY OF MID-LIFE AND OLDER WOMEN** by sending for the *Women's Initiative Publications List/D12988/American Association of Retired Persons/Fulfillment/1909 K St. NW/Washington, DC 20049.*

A biannual newsletter reports on trends and issues in American **FAMILY LIFE** and explores their implications for the Jewish community. *The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee/Institute of Human Relations/165 E. 56th St./New York, NY 10022.* Also available from the AJC is **SKINHEADS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY COME TO TOWN.** Send SASE.

A chronicle of the white supremacist movement over the last ten years — **HATE VIOLENCE AND WHITE SUPREMACY** — identifies 230 organized hate groups. From the *Southern Poverty Law Center/Klanwatch Project/400 Washington Ave./Montgomery, AL 36195.*

Sample issues of **CHAIN OF LIFE: A FEMINIST ADOPTION REFORM NEWSLETTER** are available for $2 payable to *Janine Baer/Chain of Life/PO Box 8081/Berkeley, CA 94707.*

LOOK AND LISTEN

A video documentary series and study guide for high school students, **WITNESS TO THE HOLOCAUST,** consists of seven 20-minute segments narrated primarily by survivors. $100 from *Braun Center for Holocaust Studies/Anti-Defamation League/823 United Nations Plaza/New York, NY 10017.*

A new film by Lori Hiris, "With A Vengeance: The Fight for Reproductive Freedom," describes the history of women's struggles for **ABORTION RIGHTS** since the 1960's. *Women Make Movies, Inc./225 Lafayette St. Suite 211/New York, NY 10012.*

VISIONS OF RUSSIA: A GRANDDAUGHTER RETURNS is a video by Sharon Cohen that paints an up-to-date and realistic portrait of daily life in the Soviet Union in general and Soviet Jewish life in particular. $34.95 from *Ergo Media/PO Box 2037/Teaneck, NJ 07666.*

A cassette of Hebrew, English and Yiddish **SONGS FOR CHILDREN** features activity songs on one side and lullabies on the other side. Send $10 plus $2 shipping to *Judy Caplan Ginsburgh/POB 12692/Alexandria, LA 71315.*

An annotated **CATALOGUE OF 600 VIDEOS** on more than 900 subjects relevant to Jewish education is available for $15 from *The Media Center/Board of Jewish Education/426 W. 58th St./New York, NY 10019.*

A 45-minute videotape **SANCTITY OF JEWISH MARRIAGE** is an introduction to the use of *mikvah* (ritual bath), with observations by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz and conversations with four couples. Available in French and Russian versions as well, the video is $50 from *Mikveh Israel/7015 Kildare/Cote St. Luc/Quebec, H4W 1C1/Canada.*

CALLS FOR MATERIALS

Entries for the fourth annual Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award for **POEMS ON THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE** will be accepted through Aug. 31. Poets should write first for entry form and guidelines with SASE, by July 31, to: *Poetry Award Coordinator/Judah L. Magnes Museum/Berkeley, CA 94705.*

Applications for the second annual competition for the Corinne Guntzel Memorial Grant to support projects and research in **WOMEN'S HISTORY** should be postmarked by Oct. 1. Awards will range from $250 to $500. *Harlene Gilbert/c/o The Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation/PO Box 603/Seneca Falls, NY 13148.*

If you have **ARTIFACTS, PHOTOGRAPHS OR FILM FOOTAGE** related to the diversity of Jewish life in Europe and North Africa, the Holocaust and war crimes trials, and Jewish immigration and settlement in the United States from 1654 to the present for

possible use in exhibits, contact *Esther Brumberg/A Living Memorial to the Holocaust-Museum of Jewish Heritage/342 Madison Ave. Suite 717/New York, NY 10173.*

Objects of American Jewish history, celebration, everyday life and art, particularly those reflecting the early American period, the Sephardi experience, the recent immigrations from Iran, the Soviet Union, South Africa and the Middle East are sought for **PROJECT AMERICANA** *Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum/3077 University Ave./Los Angeles, CA 90007/Contact: Lynne Gilberg.*

For a study of experiences growing up Jewish in predominantly non-Jewish communities, individuals who have or are presently living in **SMALL TOWNS** with a total population of less than 25,000 are requested to contact *Howard V. Epstein/Department of Social Work/Georgia State University/PO Box 4018/Atlanta, GA 30302.*

For a book of **JEWISH INSPIRATIONAL STORIES,** please send accounts of actual events that provide renewed faith in divine guidance or in the human capacity to do good deeds to *Lawrence J. Epstein/Humanities Division/Suffolk Community College/533 College Rd./Selden, NY 11784.*

Individuals whose families lived on **FARMS IN THE MIDWEST OR GREAT PLAINS REGION** are sought for a book on this period in Jewish American history. *Dr. J. Stanford Rikoon/Department of Rural Sociology/Sociology Building Room 108/University of Missouri/Columbia, MO 65211.*

FOR INSTRUCTION

A year of work, study and living experience aimed at exploring Jewish roots will be offered to 10 to 15 students, beginning in September at the new **JEWISH RENEWAL LIFE CENTER,** a project of P'nai Or. Contact *Rabbi Julie Greenberg/Jewish Renewal Life Center/6445 Greene St. B-202/Philadlephia, PA 19119.*

"Keva" is a unique outreach project that enables individuals living in areas remote from Jewish educational facilities to **STUDY JUDAISM BY CORRESPONDENCE.** Information may be obtained from *Rabbi Bogot/Department for Religous Education/Union of American Hebrew Congregations/838 Fifth Ave./New York, NY 10021.*

The first **TEXAS JEWISH FEMINIST CONFERENCE** will be held Oct. 19-21 in Houston, TX, sponsored by the Women's Issues Committee of the Houston Chapter of the American Jewish Committee. Speakers include Lynn Gottlieb, Irena Klepfisz and Susannah Heschel. Contact *The American Jewish Commitee/2600 Southwest Freeway Suite 714/Houston, TX 77098.*

The summer institute of the **NATIONAL HAVURAH COMMITTEE** will be held at Harcum Jr. College, Bryn Mawr, PA, Aug. 6-12. Contact *Michael Chefitz/NHC/9315 SW 61 Ct./Miami, FL 33156.*

The International Women's Writing Guild's 13th Annual Summer Conference, celebrating **THE NEW DECADE: WRITING AND HIGHER VALUES** will be held July 27-Aug. 5 at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. *IWWG/PO Box 810 Gracie Station/New York, NY 10028.*

The National Women's Studies Association Mid-Atlantic Region conference **CROSSING BORDERS/TEARING DOWN WALLS** will be held October 19-21. Contact *Myrna Goldenberg/Montgomery College/Department of English/Rockville, MD 20850.*

The 15th annual **CONFERENCE ON ALTERNATIVES IN JEWISH EDUCATION** will be held Aug. 10-16 in Columbus, OH. This gathering of individuals involved in the transmission of Jewish heritage, also offers a teen program and child care. Contact *The Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education/261 W. 35th St. Floor 12A/New York, NY 10001.*

During July and August, The Workmen's Circle is offering five-day programs, and one weekend of **THE JEWISH CULTURAL EXPERIENCE** at Circle Lodge in Dutchess County, New York. Contact *The Culture and Education Department/The Workmen's Circle/45 E. 33rd St./New York, NY 10016.*

TZEDAKAH

The **AIDS NATIONAL INTERFAITH NETWORK** is a coalition of religious organizations and individuals geared to providing strong national leadership in reaching out to those with AIDS. For further information, to join or send a contribution, write to: *ANIN/474 Riverside Dr. 10th floor/New York, NY 10115.*

Approximately 80 Israeli rabbis from the four major streams in Judaism have formed a **RABBINIC HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.** They help raise consciousness concerning violations of human rights, offer rabbinic counseling for soldiers and their parents, and serve as lecturers for the army and high schools on Jewish values. Contributions may be sent to *Rabbinic Human Rights Watch/POB 32225/Jerusalem Israel.*

If you would like to **BECOME A PEN PAL** with a Jewish man or woman in prison, please send your name and address to *Betty Hilton, International Coalition for Jewish Prisoner Services/1640 Rhode Island Ave. NW/Washington, DC 20036.*

Discarded **HEARING AIDS** – to be checked and repaired by volunteers and forwarded to Israeli hospitals for distribution to needy individuals – can be sent to *Jews for Jews/Rabbi Rubin R. Dobin/Israeli Hearing Aid Project/17720 N. Bay Rd. Suite 8D/Miami Beach, FL 33160.*

To help save the lives of individuals such as Alison Atlas, age 20, a New York University student who is **SUFFERING FROM LEUKEMIA,** tax-deductible contributions – to defray the costs for blood tests to find compatible donors for bone marrow transplants – may be sent to *Life-Savers Foundation/PO Box 1238/Great Neck, NY 11024.*

PROJECTS

WIN.PAC is the only **WOMEN'S PRO-ISRAEL** national political action committee making contributions to U.S. senators and representatives of both political parties based on the single issue of commitment to the survival and security of the U.S. and the State of Israel. For information, contact *WIN.PAC/2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Suite 275/Washington, DC 20006.*

Write to your U.S. senators and representatives to ensure that a Voice of America project in Israel will not damage a major migratory bird flyway in one of the Negev Desert's last remaining **WILDERNESS NATURE PRESERVES.** Further information from *American Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel/330 Seventh Ave. 21st floor/New York, NY 10001.*

– Compiled by Naomi Danis

BEYOND BELLY JOY:

Weddings For The Socially Responsible

by Shoshana Jedwab

The Moss Twins

Several months before my wedding, I was struck with an odd, sudden sense of loss. Beyond the hundreds of strands of detail — deciding on flowers, designing invitations, choosing a photographer, searching for a gown — something was missing. I phoned my father in Brooklyn. "Dad," I said, "What were weddings like in Drobnin [Poland] when you were a boy?"

He described weddings in which the entire town participated, parades down the main street of Drobnin, mothers-of-the-bride — in the midst of the crowds — dancing with fat, round challahs and candles.

"But Shoshana," he said to me seriously, "really, the most important thing about weddings was that the poor people got fed." Lots of children carrying *pushkes* (charity boxes) circulated through the crowds collecting money for yeshivas and settlements in Palestine, for poor brides' funds, for *tomchai shabbat* (Sabbath food funds) and for the burial society. "Three quarters of our town was so poor they didn't have what to put on the bread," as my father phrases it.

Since the whole town (400 families) was always invited to every wedding, dozens of poor people (whose general fare was potatoes, sauerkraut and beans) had a rare chance to "eat elegantly," feasting on chicken, goose, wine, *tzimmis*, *lukshen*, cake and beautiful challah. According to my father, the non-poor arrived at weddings with their pockets filled with money, knowing they would fulfill their Jewish responsibility to give charity to the poor.

When I shared my dad's wedding reminiscences with my fiance Bob, we both felt suddenly relieved. So that's what was missing from our wedding! With this realization, we both determined to add *tzedakah* (charity) and *gemilut chesed* (acts of lovingkindness) to our celebration. Though we couldn't invite all of New York, we could certainly restore good values and social responsibility to the wedding agenda.

I have always loved the Talmudic concept of *bal tashchit* (not wasting finite resources). The poetic wording of this Biblical injunction not to be un-ecological is, "When you besiege a city in war, do not destroy its trees . . . for is a tree a person that it should be besieged by you?" [Deuteronomy 20:19].

Since the sheer waste of food at weddings has always offended me, the first commitment that Bob and I made was to observe *bal tashchit*. Enlisting our caterer to pack up all the wedding's leftovers, our best man brought boxes full of food to a soup kitchen.

Next, Bob and I created a "playbill." Not only did this explain the elements of a traditional wedding to our guests, but it also requested that our guests donate *tzedakah* to two causes: Project O.R.E., a city-wide outreach program to the homeless Jewish elderly (236 W. 23rd St., New York, NY 10011, 212-645-9726), and West Side Campaign Against Hunger, a general (non-Jewish) hunger fund which runs a pantry for the poor in Manhattan (263 W. 86th St., New York, NY 10024, 212-362-3662).

While doing some pre-wedding Torah study, I discovered Maimonides' phrase "belly joy" (*simchat kraiso*). Drinking, feasting and merrymaking that neglects social concern is no more than gaspingly vapid "belly joy." Against the offense of belly joy, Bob and I decided to order centerpieces from P'tach, an organization which raises funds to help keep learning-disabled students mainstreamed at yeshivas (4612 13th Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11219, 718-854-8600).

In point of fact, the true moral breadth of our "good deeds" equation included the thorny issue of compromise. Bob would have chosen to have a "very small wedding in a friend's backyard." My parents, on the other hand, had their own wedding fantasies to fulfill. My mother had lived through the American Depression, my father through the Holocaust. Their joy at their ability to provide me with a lavish wedding was, I slowly and painfully came to realize, their own *tzedakah* (charity) to me. For both Bob and me, sensitivity to our parents' wishes became part of the ethical equation.

Finally, I reminded myself that *tzedakah* applies to oneself as well as to others. I gave myself the Julliard string trio I deeply wanted and the hairdresser who did an expensive "house-call." Bob's act of kindness to himself was to mandate that the complimentary monogrammed matchbooks were taboo. (He hates smoke!)

When all was said and done, we could have given a lot more. Mazon is an organization that combats hunger across the U.S. and suggests that Jews tithe themselves three percent of their *simcha* (celebration) expenses (2940 Westwood Blvd., Suite 4, Los Angeles, CA 90064, 213-470-7769). N'shei Ahavas Chesed of Borough Park rents bridal gowns at prorated costs and donates the proceeds to charity (1625 46th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11204, 718-871-6656). And I wish we'd thought of inviting some elderly or lonely or poor people who were strangers to our wedding.

Besides the obvious gain of providing practical help to a few needy people, blending *tzedakah* into our wedding allowed Bob and me to begin our marriage on a thoughtful footing. We started the intimate process of working out our spiritual goals with each other, and with the world around us.

It was a good beginning. L

Shoshana Jedwab is educational director at The Jewish Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side.